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LADY BELL

VOL. II.

LADY BELL

A Story of Last Century

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CITOYENNE JACQUELINE"

IN THREE VOLS.—II.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A MESSAGE OUT OF THE PAST	1
II. FREED BY THE VISITATION OF GOD	15
III. KEEPING HOUSE TOGETHER	28
IV. FRIENDS IN NEED	41
V. BOW BELLS AND THE FAMILY IN CLEVELAND COURT	58
VI. A GAY YOUNG MADAM	71
VII. MAKING AN ACQUAINTANCE AT THE PANTHEON .	82
VIII. OPINIONS DIFFER	95
IX. BOULTON'S COINS AND WEDGWOOD'S DISHES . .	106
X. A PARTY ON THE WATER	124
XI. DISCORD	135
XII. THE LITTLE DINNER AT HAMPTON, WITH MUSIC ON THE WATER	149
XIII. A VISIT TO LEICESTER FIELDS	162
XIV. SIR JOSHUA AT HOME	174
XV. THE MASQUED BALL IN PROSPECT	185
XVI. THE MASQUED BALL AS IT BEGAN IN REALITY .	198
XVII. THE "COMMON DOMINO"	210
XVIII. ROMEO AND JULIET ON THE STAGE, AND IN LADY BELL TREVOR AND MISS GREATHEAD'S BOX . .	222
XIX. THE MEETING ON THE MALL	240
XX. TO TIE OR NOT TO TIE THE KNOT?	251
XXI. ISLINGTON CHURCH EARLY ONE MARCH MORNING .	264
XXII. BACK AT SUMMERHILL	276

CHAPTER I.

A MESSAGE OUT OF THE PAST.

ONE hot day in the latter end of June, Lady Bell was sitting in the orchard, with Mrs. Sundon's child in her lap, cooing to it, tickling it, tossing it, decking it with daisies, pretending to herself and to it, that the not-many-weeks-old child noticed and appreciated its floral finery.

The long, flower-besprinkled grass grew all round, beneath the bending, leafy boughs, through the shadows of which came perpetually shifting chequers of sunshine. There could just be seen, down a vista, the quaint, grey house of Nutfield, with the last year's yellow corn-stacks beyond the orchard, mellowing and warming the green and grey

tints under the blue and white cloud-flecked sky.

Mrs. Sundon with her fine figure and face, in one of her white wrappers and close caps, came slowly up between the interlacing boughs; she stopped beside Lady Bell and the child, looking down upon them. The group was very sweet and graceful, and wanted only a St. Joseph and a little St. John to make it stand for one of the old Italian "Riposos."

"Look here, Lady Bell," said Mrs. Sundon, putting her finger on a paragraph in a newspaper which she held in her hand.

Lady Bell started and rose up in vague perturbation. For precaution's sake Mrs. Sundon had abstained from giving her friend, even in private, that friend's name and title, since Mrs. Sundon had discovered Lady Bell at Nutfield. What had surprised the compromising words from Mrs. Sundon now?

Lady Bell took the newspaper and looked at the place indicated. Her hand was shaking, her breath was coming fast, her eyes

were dazzled; but the intimation was so plain and direct that she took in its meaning at a glance. There was no ambiguity there to prevent the message reaching its destination and doing its work. "If Lady Bell Trevor wish to see her husband in life, let her return at once to Trevor Court."

A mist passed before Lady Bell's eyes; the sunny June orchard, with the soft, fair child whom Mrs. Sundon had taken into her arms, and Mrs. Sundon herself, all grew in a moment blurred and dark, as if the very dews of death and remorse had fallen on them.

"Oh, Mrs. Sundon, what shall I do?" cried Lady Bell, wringing her hands. "I did not love him, I had no cause to love him; but I was his wife, who was yet no wife to him, and he is a dying man."

"Go back to him immediately," advised Mrs. Sundon, "while there is still time to wipe out your offence to him—it was light compared with his to you. But it is ill having an unsettled score with the dead.

This would hang like a millstone round your neck, and weigh you down all your days."

"I'll go back if you counsel it," submitted Lady Bell desperately, setting off in nervous haste to the house. "But how am I to face him? if he have strength left to lift his hand still, will he strike me as I have seen him strike his man? Or, if he is gone, must I stay in the house with the dead, I who never saw anybody die but Lady Lucie, who died blessing me? Would that I had minded her precepts better; she would not have had me leave the worst of husbands. And how many miles will it be to post cross country, Mrs. Sundon? you have a good head and may guess. Can you tell me if I shall be as long in going as I was in coming here? only I did not come straight! Oh! will you be so kind as to lend me the money you think I shall need, for I have only three crowns in my purse?"

"My dear, I shall take you," said Mrs. Sundon quietly. "Do you think I would send you off on such an errand alone?"

“Oh, I am so thankful,” Lady Bell admitted in her relief, “now I may do my duty at last; no, I don’t mean that,” she checked herself the next moment, “I cannot hear of you doing such a thing. How could you leave your baby? You are too delicate yet for such a journey—and to go to that neighbourhood above all others. It is vastly generous of you to propose it, just what I should have expected from you; but, of course, I cannot consent; I shall manage by myself, somehow.”

“Say no more, Lady Bell,” Mrs. Sundon put an end to the discussion, “I am going with you. The child will do very well with her nurse. Do you think I would put my child, any more than myself, between me and my duty and privilege? I should call that treating my child very ill, paying her a poor compliment, for which I should hope she would never thank me. I am abler for the journey than I was for coming here. I need not fear to go near Chevely, which has been sold, as I dare say you’ve heard. You

cannot tell what I can do without harm to my health," declared Mrs. Sundon, with a little bitterness. "I travelled from what had been my home, handed into the carriage by a bailiff on starting, and went out of town when my child was no more than ten days old. I could not have slept another night under that roof. But even if I had been a weaker woman, I should not have shrunk from this poor effort, and you would not have refused me my right."

Lady Bell had no longer the heart, any more than the will, to decline Mrs. Sundon's support in the emergency. If Mrs. Sundon's presence made Mr. Trevor mad—should he regard it as another act of wilful disobedience even when Lady Bell was pretending to obey him—it would be time enough then to undertake the ungracious task of refusing the elder woman's countenance.

The great news that Mrs. Sundon and Mrs. Barlowe were to set off on horseback within the hour, availing themselves, by permission, of Miss Kingscote's and Master

Charles's horses, in order to reach Lumley, where they were to hire a chaise to proceed on a journey of indefinite duration, fell flat. It was as nothing compared to the stunning shock inflicted on Miss Kingscote when Mrs. Sundon saw fit to communicate to the hostess the real rank and history of her companion.

“Lud! lud! a Lady Bell all the time, and I to have gone and found fault with her, and kept her pottering about my business, mending lace, and cleaning silver, lud-a-mercy, what shall I do, brother? Mayn't I be took up by the King or the Lords, like the 'torney was, whom I've heard tell of, no farther gone than father and mother's day, afore we came down in the world, and I were a mite of a child—he gave a warrant to arrest a fine lady in her coach in the street, at the suit of a tradesman, and he himself was had up before the justices—I mean afore the Lords, for an insult to the quality. Mayn't I be had up and put in prison, though I never knowed, nor meant it, and I'll beg her pardon over and over

again, and she was a right-down pleasant lass, madam—Lud ! I'm losing my head—lady, save when she was in the tantrums.”

“ Nonsense, Deb,” exclaimed Master Charles impatiently ; “ you did her a kindness, and helped her in her end. As it proves,” he continued a little sarcastically ; “ whether Miss or Madam, she has been all along far beyond our flight, and will never waste another thought on us, now that she has found birds of her own feather, and is ready to go off with them to her own perch.”

“ She were a runaway wife all the same,” reflected Miss Kingscote sapiently, “ though she were ten times a Lady Bell, and she had left her man as must have been hers in the face of day, which made the leaving a heap bolder in my madam—nay, my lady. I vow I as good as telled her she was no match for the Kingscotes of Nutfield.”

“ You had nothing to do to say anything of the kind, even though this Lady Bell had been a simple waiting-maid or scullion,

I don't care which," Master Charles was provoked into telling his sister, as his good-humoured indulgence gave way. "The Kingscotes have not kept their own in the world without loss, and they can ill afford to despise the humblest—I say that, if I am supposed to have anything to do with the future matching of the Kingscotes," declared the young gentleman loftily, "and they'll be long enough of being matched for me, since I could bring a mate to little better than a farm-house, and a farmer's kin. I'll thank you, Deb, not to meddle in the matter."

"There, I've given offence to Master Charles," Miss Kingscote reflected glumly after she was alone. "He's taken to hurting my feelings by twitting me with what we've lost, as if the worst loss weren't mine! not that I show it neither, for I'm sure I'm a powerful fine woman, considering my lack of education. And so she's Lady Bell, and if she had bidden still, I mun have said my lady every blessed word, and

run at her heels as I've never made her run at mine. But if this Squire Trevor, as she has given leg-bail to, had not come on the carpet, first and foremost, ere we set eyes on her, mightn't she have been my Lady Bell Kingscote! That do sound fine! prodigious fine! But if there had never been no Squire Trevor, there would never have been no bolting, banding with the players, turning up at Nutfield, and making friends with Master Charles, so there is an end on't. My Master Charles mun go to the wars, and risk a sabre's cut spoiling his bonnie face," mused Miss Kingscote, whimpering at the very thought, "afore he fill his chimney-corner, and bring home his lady to sit down cheek by jowl with him, while I'll be right glad to retire to mother's room, save when they want my company, for I ain't teathy or prideful—I never were. That mun be the order of the day, as Master Charles ought to know."

Even before the parting, Master Charles had cause to renounce his mortified con-

viction of how little he and his sister were to Lady Bell Trevor, and of how she had done with them from this day.

She was grateful for the assistance and escort as far as Lumley, which he offered so soon as he ascertained that the offer would be agreeable to her and Madam Sundon.

Lady Bell put her head out of the chaise window at the last. Her scared eyes looked with almost timid beseeching into his face. She told him, without any sign of haughtiness, but with many tokens of a retentive memory for the smallest act of consideration and kindness, of contrition for having played a part to him and his sister, and for not having trusted them in full; that she had been very well off and happy at Nutfield. She hoped that his colours would arrive soon, that he would see a campaign to his wish, and return safe and sound to cheer his sister's heart.

Lady Bell sent Miss Kingscote her grateful duty. Lady Bell trusted they would meet again, when she would be able to

finish her chair-covers. In the meantime, she would not forget to procure patterns for Miss Kingscote. Miss Kingscote must be especially kind to Lady Bell's brood of chicks—the first brood she had seen set, seen hatched, and fed every day with her own hands.

It was plain that for the moment, in place of being eager to resume her cast-off rank and state, Lady Bell had forgotten where and why she was going, and everything about Squire Trevor and his danger. It was only when the chaise rolled off, and she sank back in her corner, that she withdrew into herself to face the grim record of the bond she had broken, and the forfeit she was called on to pay.

It was on a fresh summer morning, when, having started early to accomplish the last stage of their journey, Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon came in sight of Trevor Court.

The gates were standing open; early as it was, the lodge seemed deserted, so that

the chaise entered without parley. The dew was lying like pearls on the grass by the drive, and silvering the yews on the terrace. The spirals of smoke from the red chimneys were rising straight in the clear air. A gush of birds' song sounded far and wide. There was something light, bright, and exhilarating in the air, and in the aspect of nature, which lent a peculiar charm to what was imposing in the pile of building and its grounds.

"I have not seen Trevor Court before, save from a distance," Mrs. Sundon let fall the remark. "You never told me, Lady Bell, what a fine old place it was."

"I don't think I ever noticed it till the last time I saw it," Lady Bell replied almost in a whisper; she recalled vividly that last time sitting on the September morning in the travelling chariot beside its master, who lingered in taking a short leave of his treasure.

The next moment Lady Bell gave a shriek and put her hands before her face.

The chaise had turned into the sweep before the house, where, in sombre contrast to the summer morning, the windows were all shrouded, and the hatchment was up.

CHAPTER II.

FREED BY THE VISITATION OF GOD.

IT was as a quailing widow, and not as a reluctant wife, that Lady Bell re-entered the old oak parlour, where she still trembled lest she should hear her husband's loud, rough accents stuttering with rage, and his stick, when gout confined him to his chair, savagely beating the floor.

Mrs. Walsh, in her towering cap and starched frill, received Lady Bell, and spoke to the point, without softening or reservation. "Yes, it is all over, Lady Bell, the Squire died last night at ten o'clock. He was took with a jaundice on Wednesday se'en night; but no danger was apprehended till five days ago, when Mr. Walsh writ the

notice for the papers—to no purpose, so far as the Squire's desiring to see and speak with you once more was concerned. You and he will not see and speak with each other on this side of the judgment day."

"Oh, Mrs. Walsh, I came as fast as ever I could." Lady Bell humbled herself in the dust before her ancient enemy. "I know now I was a bad, bad wife. I would give all I have in the world to be able to live the last year over again, and do my duty by your cousin, who is lying stiff and cold in one of these rooms, where I shall never hear him say that he forgives me, that he makes allowance at last for my youth, my wounded pride—what had a sinful creature to do with pride?—my forced inclinations. Oh! tell me he did not lay his curse upon me with his last breath?" implored Lady Bell, ready to sink down with grief and terror, while she clasped her hands and looked up, her distended eyes brimming over with scalding tears, in Mrs. Walsh's inflexible face.

“Yes, Lady Bell, you were a bad wife, and you would not take a telling while it was in your power,” declared the uncompromising woman, standing bolt upright, her very mittens bristling with her righteous protest.

“Madam,” interposed Mrs. Sundon with rising indignation, “it is monstrous to reproach this poor child at such a time. She is sufficiently crushed by the nature of the event which has taken place, following on her rashness. She will not be likely to forget it, even without your accusations to embitter the blow. I vouch for Lady Bell’s having lived in safety and honour since she quitted her husband. Madam, you will not refuse my voucher?”

“Madam, I have not heard your honesty questioned, therefore I grant that Lady Bell has come back in honest company,” acknowledged Mrs. Walsh stiffly, “which is more than might have been hoped, from her flying in the face of law and duty, and exposing herself to the worst perils.”

“Though you are the late Mr. Trevor’s kinswoman, you must know,” said Mrs. Sundon, “that Lady Bell Trevor has been more sinned against than sinning.”

“I know that she is not too young or fair or fine to be accountable for her errors to a Power before which the most wilful lady will not dare to plead her daintiness,” maintained Mrs. Walsh doggedly. “But I know, too, that you were sinned against, Lady Bell,” she added candidly, turning to the overwhelmed offender. “So far as that goes, Squire Trevor did not deserve your duty. But you had the will of a higher than my poor cousin to consider, and where should we all be, if we got our due, and no more? It was on the Squire’s mind at the last that he had wronged you; and he sought to receive, as well as to bestow, forgiveness, before he could die in peace.”

“I did not merit it,” said Lady Bell; “but you told him, dear Mrs. Walsh—oh, say that you told the old man that I forgave him, as I hope to be forgiven?”

“I charged him to repent, and if he had done any wrong to a fellow-creature which he could atone for, to make amends. Then I bade him turn for forgiveness for that, and all his sins, to the great God and Saviour, against whom he had chiefly sinned, but who would never refuse him forgiveness, since, in the very act of his seeking it, they were pledged for his salvation.”

“Oh, thank God! that he died in peace with me,” broke in Lady Bell impetuously.

“Rather thank God that he died in peace with his Maker, madam,” Mrs. Walsh did not fail to rebuke her. “I think he did; I am fain to hope he did, though he was not able to fulfil his part of the obligation here; the will must stand for the deed. ’Torney Kenyon, who did all the Squire’s business, was from home, at the wedding of his son in Bristol. We sent twice, but we could not get hold of the man in time. I think it is better to tell you at once, Lady Bell, what you will hear later.”

“As you will, madam,” replied Lady Bell dejectedly.

“The Squire’s will was executed long before he ever saw your face, when his estate was bequeathed, failing any heir of his body, to my eldest son Jack. The substance of that will has been repeated since you offended the Squire, and it has neither been revoked nor altered, as my cousin certainly desired it to be altered, in his dying moments. But Mr. Walsh and me, expecting that you, or some one for you, would answer our summons, if you were in the country, have made up our minds, and will answer for Jack at his college, to take your wishes on the matter.”

“I have no wishes, Mrs. Walsh,” exclaimed Lady Bell hastily.

“We shall let you have whatever compensation you desire,” went on Mrs. Walsh, paying no heed to the demur, “being well aware that such were Squire Trevor’s intentions while he was yet in the body, and in his right mind, so that you are indebted to

no bounty, but to bare justice for your share of the worldly inheritance that our cousin has left behind him."

"Madam, this honourable conduct does you and Mr. Walsh infinite credit." Mrs. Sundon could not refrain from awarding her hearty approbation to her late antagonist.

"Mrs. Sundon, I repeat that 'tis but justice," argued Mrs. Walsh with a stateliness of her own, winding up with her own favourite axiom, "The world and I have shaken hands long ago."

"You are all a great deal too kind to me," wept Lady Bell, "a rebel who deserted my post. But indeed I had liefer, if you do not think it an impertinence in me to make an objection, that Mr. Trevor's goods went to you and your son Jack, his friends. I am sure I have no right to a single sixpence."

"Beware of pride and sauciness still under the garb of disinterestedness, Lady Bell," Mrs. Walsh said severely.

“Nay, I’ll do whatever you will,” Lady Bell hastened to amend her statement, quite subdued, and feeling sadly as if she would never have the heart to have a will of her own again.

“Madam, a second time everything shall be as you will, and as your friends—such as Madam Sundon and your man of business, if you will please to name him—may decide for you,” Mrs. Walsh laid down the law.

Lady Bell knew that she was not and never would be mistress of Trevor Court. Not that she desired it; she even recoiled from it as from a sacrilege.

After the funeral, when the two ladies happened to be alone together, Mrs. Sundon said to Lady Bell—

“They are good people, these Walshes, my dear. I should think very good people to deal with and to raise a country parish sunk in rude ignorance and gross transgression. That was not your case exactly, but I think you might have got on with

them, and been the better and not the worse for them. To be plain with you, I cannot help saying, though it may be presumptuous, that I think I could have got on with them. I could acquire a great regard for that woman, and I fancy I might have a still greater for her good man. As for Sally, I should have sought to soften her brusqueness; yet brusqueness is not so great a fault when it comes to weighing faults. But you were too young, and you were petulant between youth and hard usage."

"I shall get on with them now," said Lady Bell wistfully, looking incredibly young and very fair in the weeds which had been provided for her, and which she had hastened to put on with her trembling frightened fingers, as a mark of respect for the dead, doing it the more eagerly because she had failed in respect for the living.

"I see the servants look sourly on me, and no wonder," confided Lady Bell to her friend, "for they stood by their master,

whom his wife left. But I'll bear it, and try to bring them to think better of me, though Trevor Court is not mine, and I cannot stay here, and keep the old people and ask them to serve me. Mrs. Walsh will see to her cousin's household, that is my comfort. I will do everything Mrs. Walsh bids me from this time. I'll be good, Mrs. Sundon," promised Lady Bell, with a faint smile at her own childishness. "But seriously, Mrs. Walsh took my place, and saved me from a grievous reflection which would have haunted my death-bed. She will teach me to be a self-denying, devoted Christian woman like herself. I believe I did not judge Sally Walsh justly," Lady Bell finished with a little sigh of compunction and doubt. "I dare say she was not so pert and rude as I thought her. I know she was far more dutiful than I have been."

Mrs. Sundon said nothing more at the time; but she determined that she would not leave Lady Bell with the Walshes,

though Mrs. Sundon was able to do them justice. "They were never the people, however good their intentions, to have the guidance of Lady Bell," reflected the lady. "Now that Lady Bell's spirit is broke and her conscience burdened, she would become their slave. I had almost as soon put her into a nunnery, where in the present state of her feelings, she would be content to take refuge, but where in time she would be driven either into fanaticism or hypocrisy, my generous, tender Lady Bell! Just when she is freed too, by the judgment of God, from her cruel gaoler (God forgive him!) and restored to hope and happiness. Why, there is a bright life before Lady Bell which nothing has come to spoil beyond recall. So help me, I will make it bright and safe for her as I would make it for my little Caro, since Lady Bell came forward of her own sweet will and did what she could to keep me in Paradise. Oh! it is well for Lady Bell that with all her early trials she has not taken forbidden fruit into her mouth,

and found it turn to dust and ashes between her teeth. There is no great good under the sun, but I will pursue the lesser good for my Lady Bell when she begins to look up and smile again. Bless the child ! what is the loss by honest death of such a husband as Squire Trevor, though she was desperate enough to run away from him, compared to what some women have to bear ? I will keep the knowledge of evil from her, as I would keep it from Caro. She shall not fail to be, so far as I can help her, a devoted Christian woman ; but it shall be after her own kind. ‘ Wisdom shall be justified of all her children.’ ”

The Squire’s funeral sermon was preached. It was not without its unvarnished allusions, even though they were in the mouth of Mrs. Walsh’s mild spouse, and not of the most redoubtable champion of truth in the parish, to the evils of stout spirits, stormy passions, and family discord. It was listened to with penitent humiliation and meekness.

A decent interval passed, and the arrangements were completed, by which Lady Bell was put into possession of a moderate jointure, in addition to her marriage settlement, from her deceased husband's estate.

Then Mrs. Sundon hurried her friend just a little on the plea of the necessity of Mrs. Sundon's return to her child, and carried Lady Bell back to Nutfield in the first place.

CHAPTER III.

KEEPING HOUSE TOGETHER.

LADY BELL and Mrs. Sundon were so well pleased with each other, that they agreed finally to take up house together. They liked the air and aspect of Nutfield so well, that they fixed on dwelling in the neighbourhood, though no longer under the wing of Miss Kingscote.

The two ladies rented one of the cottages *ornés* which were beginning to be built between the town of Lumley and Nutfield.

Summerhill had for its nucleus a one-storeyed erection of black and white timber, to which a wooden verandah had been added all round. The whole was set in a large enough garden and paddock to afford room

for ingenuity to propose and execute a number of wonderful performances in the shape of winding walks, mounds, grottos, bowers, even a dovecot and a dairy.

The house was unfurnished, so that the tenants had another gain in fitting it up according to their tastes. Everything that Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon ordered for their use was bright and tasteful. There was a good deal of white painted wood and white dimity, relieved by warm, deep-coloured carpet-work and rich embroidery.

The ladies gave evidence in the decorations of their house of ability and refinement, according to the standard of their day. There were home-manufactured brackets, sconces, card-baskets, and music-trays in abundance. These things supplied Lady Bell with endless employment, and were sources of pride and delight to her.

Lady Bell had thought to herself, first when she became a widow, that she should go softly mourning for her sins and her strife with Squire Trevor all her days. She

was perfectly sincere then, as well as afterwards, and she did not cease to be sorry for having done wrong ; but to her surprise, and a little to her shame, not only did her youthful spirits soon recover their elasticity and throw off the load of contrition and melancholy reflections ; but in addition she was very happy—happier than she had ever been in her life before, not even excepting her early days with Lady Lucie Penraddock.

Lady Bell was not merely like one of those graceful creatures of the air which, casting the slough of the chrysalis, rises buoyant in its elegance and beauty. She had found a true mate, a companion and friend, a natural equal and ally.

Eventful as the last year had been, and calculated to develop her nature, Lady Bell was not past the age when girls like her have the strongest tendency to contract friendship with members of their own sex, and when indeed for the most part the closest, firmest, womanly friendships are

formed. And that was the generation of women's friendships, crowned by the sacrifice of the world for each other, made by the two ladies of Llangollen.

There was just the amount of superiority in years, experience, and acquirements on Mrs. Sundon's part, and the kind of essential difference between the young women to confirm Lady Bell's romantic admiration for her friend, without preventing a free and full interchange of sentiment and opinion.

Lady Bell resumed gladly and with grateful acknowledgment of the support which she received from Mrs. Sundon, all Lady Bell's native pursuits, which had been so continually interrupted and baulked.

A modern girl commanding a thousand modes of cultivation, until she is oppressed by them, will find it hard to comprehend the self-respect and satisfaction with which Lady Bell returned to her studies; her French—in which Mrs. Sundon was a better qualified assistant, so far as speaking went,

than Mr. Greenwood at St. Bevis's—her thrumming on a spinet, her warbling of “Hark, the lark,” and “Waft her, angels.”

Mrs. Sundon kept up her connection with town and the world, and had not only fashions, but newspapers and parcels of books forwarded to her by the carrier and the bookseller in Lumley.

The ladies were abreast of their times (in which the war with America was taking more and more serious proportions), and of the literature of the day.

“Sir Charles Grandison” was becoming an oldish book, and “Evelina” had not yet come out. But Mr. Brooke’s “Fool of Quality” was making its mark, and was warmly welcomed as a step in the right direction by all good men and women, including Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell. In sermons the ladies read Porteous or Blair. In poetry they studied Mason’s “Flower Garden” and Goldsmith’s “Deserted Village,” while in travels, Pennant’s “Tour”

seemed to them to have extended to the extremity of the civilised world.

The absence, except at short intervals, of even a provincial theatre, which figured so largely as an intellectual influence at the close of the last century, was supplied in a degree to Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell. They had the vigorous notices and criticisms of the most popular plays and players in the town newspapers ; so that even while living at a distance, the ladies could enjoy at second-hand the heroics of "Douglas" and the nonsense of "Polly Honeycomb."

Lady Bell made many charming new attainments, and that season at Summerhill was, after all, in the fullest sense, the spring-time of her life, when she was learning something new every day, and was fast budding into fresh promise.

All Lady Bell's fine-lady gifts and graces had been originally overmuch of the town, townish. But Mrs. Sundon had been a fine lady of the country, as well as of the town, and could lead Lady Bell into elegant

rurality, and even inoculate the girl with a true love of the country and of country life.

Under Mrs. Sundon's superintendence, Lady Bell became a lady gardener, and advanced with rapid strides from an apprentice to a journeyman, until, in addition to her old power of embroidering facsimiles of leaves and flowers, she could make carpets and canopies of the plants themselves, hang the verandah with them, and grow living orange-trees in the window alcove of the sitting-room. She laid carnations and budded roses, and was as intent on getting seeds of Canterbury bells and slips of geraniums, as ever she had been on procuring patterns for aprons and chair-covers.

Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon had a kitchen as well as a flower-garden. They had a white cow in the paddock in summer for their own and their baby's use, and they borrowed a brood of chickens from Miss Kingscote, that they might be sure of new-laid eggs for breakfast.

The ladies did not commit these acquisitions to their establishment entirely to the care of their modest retinue of two maids and a man.

Lady Bell learnt, and did not dream that the learning was derogatory to her, to pull peas and pick gooseberries—actually to milk the cow (in a perfunctory and not very effectual manner, it must be confessed), so that she could aver from her personal knowledge that the syllabub, which she had also made with her own hands, was compounded as it ought to have been, of milk warm from the cow. She made gooseberry-fool, as well as syllabub, and was very conceited about the deed and its success.

Had poor Squire Trevor been alive and at Summerhill, his flighty young wife could even have supplied him with his desiderated tansy pudding, at this higher stage of her education, and in her greater wisdom.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell dabbled in all sorts of washes, balsams, simples, hot drinks, blackberry cheeses, and sticks of

saffron. Not being godless selfish unbelievers, and having ignorant and helpless poor neighbours, the two ladies became in their own way unquestionable Christian Ladies Bountiful—clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, tending the sick, and softening the rude, so far as their light and power went.

Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon were the two women of highest rank and polish for a considerable circuit of miles, but they were not on that account disdainful and unsocial in their intercourse with their middle-class neighbours, such as the Vicar and Mayor of Lumley, the retired military or naval officers and their families, who occupied good houses in the town, and cottages similar to Summerhill on the outskirts. On the contrary, the two ladies were rightly judged models of urbanity, a reputation which no doubt they enjoyed, being gracious where nobody presumed on their graciousness, while they countenanced the Lumley weddings, house-warmings, and christenings.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell had a hay-making on their own lawn, to which the whole population, so far as the Summerhill grounds would hold them, were invited, and came and went in ecstasies with the entertainment.

Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell became the reigning toasts of the neighbourhood.

It does not follow that the old world and the old town were sycophantish; consider the women and their circumstances.

Lady Bell Trevor, the daughter of Lord Etheredge and the widow of Squire Trevor, of Trevor Court, in the adjoining shire, was a beautiful, graceful, intelligent young woman of seventeen.

Mrs. Sundon was not more than four years older, at twenty-one very handsome, with an air of command, which had been born with her — command too well assured to be other than simple and self-denying, or to require haughtiness and arrogance to back its claims.

Mrs. Sundon was a woman living in

separation from her husband, it is true, but by an act quite different from poor Lady Bell's hushed-up escapade. Mrs. Sundon's separation from Gregory Sundon did not affect her social position in the least—in effect rather elevated it.

It was perfectly well understood through the Mayor that the details did the greatest honour to Mrs. Sundon's dignity and discretion. And dignity and discretion were qualities very highly, but not unjustly, valued in a generation liable to run into extravagant flights and excesses.

Mrs. Sundon showed the same appreciable discretion in refraining from accusing her husband, and in adopting, along with a chosen friend, a life of retirement as well as of virtue in the flower of her youth, and in bringing up her little girl—as it was quite understood Mrs. Sundon was bringing up the child, when Caro was not yet three months old—in the most meritorious manner.

The very peculiarity of the two ladies'

position with the union of their forces, gave them a freedom and weight in the society in which they moved that they could not have commanded had they been single women, that they could hardly have possessed had they been separate, though each had dwelt in the house of her husband.

With Nutfield Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon maintained the most kindly, cheerful relations, long after use and wont had hardened Miss Kingscote to the sound of "my lady." When the ladies of Summerhill wished a little variety in their domestic routine, they had only to stroll over to Nutfield to bask in its homely cordiality, and to get a little permissible fun out of Miss Kingscote's uncouth whimsicalities.

Lady Bell and Mrs. Sundon could not have managed for themselves without Master Charles to act the part of a brother to them.

In those days, when walking on country roads was not always safe for ladies, when they could not attend a single public place

with propriety, unless they were supported by male attendance, a gentleman who was a privileged friend proved indispensable in every household of women.

Sometimes the friendships thus entertained were of a peculiarly gentle and chivalrous character, which the very scandal-loving world admitted and respected. Thus it saw no objection—not even that of age—in the intimate association of a young man like Master Charles with two charming young women only a little above him in rank, since the one was a wife and the other a widow, and both were deprived of their natural protectors.

CHAPTER IV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

ONLY once was there an interruption threatened to the brother and sister relations between Master Charles and the ladies of Summerhill, and that began and ended among themselves, and had nothing to do with on-lookers.

Master Charles called on his friends one day in a moody frame of mind. He looked over some debatable accounts which belonged to Mrs. Sundon's department of the joint housekeeping. He undertook to see and settle with the offending tradesman, and bring him to reason. He agreed to stay to the three-o'clock dinner, and relieve Lady Bell from the chicken carving. Still

his mind was not lightened, so that his friends felt it necessary to press him to make a clean breast of it.

The young man admitted that he had been with a party of gentlemen on the previous evening, when horse-racing had been discussed, and bets had been freely given and taken over the wine.

He had been flushed and excited like the rest, and he had made such a book as he feared, without the greatest good luck, would be ruinous to him, when he had not yet got his property into his own hands, and any disgrace in money matters would put a stop to the exertions of the friends who were seeking to procure for him a pair of colours.

He was mad with himself, for he was by no means without sense and shrewdness as well as principle. He heartily wished that he had joined the army as a volunteer, sailed for Quebec or Boston in the first transport, and been taken prisoner by the Indians, before worse happened to him, and

before he baulked the expectations of all who had taken an interest in so foolish a fellow. He hung his head as he made the confession.

“Worse shall not happen,” Mrs. Sundon interposed with decision. “You are right in consenting to confide in us; indeed, we value your confidence, sir, and women are not always the worst councillors. I shall speak to the Mayor to come forward and help you, if the worst come to the worst; he will do something for my sake, as well as for yours. I shall have a little loan at your service.”

“And I shall club every shilling I can muster with Mrs. Sundon’s,” proposed Lady Bell eagerly; “so pray don’t be downhearted, Master Charles.”

The young man only hung his head lower. He hated to lay women under contribution to pay for his recklessness, while he dared not, were it but for the sake of another woman—his sister Deb—decline the assistance offered to him in case of necessity.

The ready generosity of his friends melted him, so that he faltered with feeling, in place of declaiming glibly in the expression of his thanks.

“Don’t speak of it,” Mrs. Sundon forbade him; “only let this be a lesson to you in the future,” she added with soft earnestness.

The young man went away subdued in his gratitude, but when the crisis was over, he presented himself in a state of riotous glee, to free the ladies from their promises, and demand their congratulations.

Master Charles’s three to one and five to two had turned out, after all, on the winning side. He had had amazing pieces of luck.

“By George! you ladies must wish me joy, and allow me the honour and felicity, as the town sparks say, of treating you to whatever takes your fancy, a prince’s plume, my Lady Bell, a lace apron, Madam Sundon; sure you richly deserve it, and I can afford to please myself for once in my

life, since in place of coming to grief by this little transaction, I vow I have made a very good thing of it," and he thrust his hands braggingly into the pockets of his frock coat.

"Yes, I claim my right to a return for my willingness to befriend you, Master Charles," cried Mrs. Sundon, before Lady Bell could speak. "I thought you were to have a lesson, but I find it to be a snare. I want no lace aprons, though I shall be happy to take one from you, if you like to grant what I ask. Promise me solemnly, sir, on the word of a gentleman, that you will both now and after you have entered the army, do your best to resist betting on cards and horses, at least round a supper-table in the heat of conviviality."

"But—but, Mrs. Sundon," objected Master Charles, taken aback, becoming immediately crest-fallen, and colouring violently. "No fellow of spirit could be expected to give and keep such a promise. I am not soft in these matters, I think for a

novice I have shown myself as sharp as my neighbours," he drew himself up and laughed, though the laugh was a little forced. "I think—I beg your pardon, but I do think you take advantage of your kindness—I own it was very great, to seek to bind me, as no man not a Molly Coddle and a nincompoop would be bound in the circumstances."

"Oh, Master Charles, think of Henry, Earl of Morland, in the 'Fool of Quality,' " implored Lady Bell, "and how you were of opinion he was a fine character, and ought to be imitated in this dissipated world."

"Such conduct is very fine in a book and in theory, but it won't do for bloods in real life and in practice," he put her off impatiently.

"Master Charles, I trust you will know that there are brave men and gallant soldiers too, that no man would dare call Molly Coddles and nincompoops, who yet set their faces against the indiscriminate betting and gambling of this gambling

age," Mrs. Sundon told him plainly; but that was not all. "Charles Kingscote," she said, appealing to him, face to face and soul to soul, as it were, when she addressed him thus by his Christian name and surname, and with her own fine pale face working with emotion and the anguish of remembrance. "If you only knew the misery and degradation wrought by this curse of gambling—what generous natures have been undone, what happy homes have been cast down in ruins, never to be built up again. Shall I lay bare the sorrows of my life to enlighten you and save you, if I can?"

"No, Mrs. Sundon," declared the young man quickly, and with pain in his moodiness. "I shall not allow such sacrilege for my fancied needs, and I should be an ingrate to deny your request as you put it, however difficult it may seem to me. I give you my word, as you desire, without farther parley—and now you will permit me to take my leave."

The moment he was gone, Lady Bell asked with a puzzled, pensive, rather scared anxiety, "Will he keep his word, think you?"

"I hope and trust he will," replied Mrs. Sundon, looking troubled still; "granting that it will cost him a great effort, he is manly and honourable enough in his youth to make such an effort; and he has not seen much bad company, that is a blessing, to corrupt him from the beginning. Poor boy! he was so happy when he came in, and we disappointed and mortified him. Do you know how he will regard me from this hour, Bell?" Mrs. Sundon inquired abruptly, with a certain wistfulness and piteousness for herself thrilling through her tones. "He is not bumptious or quarrelsome, he is a fine, warm-hearted, good-natured lad, but he will begin to hate the sight of me."

"No, no," exclaimed Lady Bell energetically.

"Yes, yes," contradicted Mrs. Sundon

quietly, shaking her head, "I know all about it. A man pretends sometimes to call a woman his mistress, but he cannot forgive her, if she ever really play the part. He will excuse almost any error in a woman sooner than her finding him wrong, and telling him so. She has humbled him then in his own eyes, and he cares for that still more than being humbled in hers. She becomes irksome to him, and he half fears her, half strives to deceive her, himself sinking lower and lower till he ends by hating her outright. When you marry again, Bell, if your main object be to preserve your husband's love, fondle and defer to him, and never admit by word or look that you recognise he has forfeited your esteem, as well as that of every honest man and woman, and is on the high road to destruction, carrying you and your unborn child along with him."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," protested Lady Bell, half crying at the idea. "I shall speak the truth and clear my con-

science, whether I shame the devil or no. But on second thoughts, I shall not need, for I shall never think of marrying again and leaving you and little Caro, and ending our happy life here, dear," declared Lady Bell, turning eagerly to caress her friend.

"You will not think of it perhaps, but you will do it all the same," said Mrs. Sundon as she gave back the caress; "however, we may let sleeping dogs lie and not anticipate evil. To return to Master Charles; see if he do not avoid me from this day."

For several weeks it seemed as if Mrs. Sundon's prognostications were to prove correct. It was not that Master Charles intermitted his visits to Summerhill, and he was even punctilious in his continued offers of service to the ladies; but somehow there was a change in the nature of the intercourse, and there was a dryness approaching to sullenness in the young gentleman's manner to Mrs. Sundon.

But at the close of these weeks Master Charles thought better of it, and came looking shame-faced, yet, but frank and ingenuous as ever, and told Mrs. Sundon, "I have been compelled to be a little more particular in my company since the promise you made me give you, which, of course, I was resolved to keep, come what like of it. But I have reaped the benefit of it already, I have discovered that there are plenty of gentlemen of parts and spirit, good judges of horse-flesh besides, who will not play at higher than half-crown points, and will not lay a wager on a horse, or a dog, unless it be so trifling a one that they have no anxiety about it, and have all their minds to bestow on their proper affairs. They are ready to welcome me to their company when they see that I prefer it. You were quite right, Mrs. Sundon, I add my poor testimony to my promise."

The dryness and sullenness disappeared from that day.

Lady Bell was jubilant at the issue, and

the restoration of their comrade, and disposed to crow over Mrs. Sundon.

“Oh! he is a good sort, as Miss Kingscote says,” confessed the authority, “he is more generous than his brethren. I am thankful to have been of use to him.” This was all that Mrs. Sundon said to Lady Bell, but in her own mind she reflected with apparent incoherence, “I could wish that he had been higher in rank, and Miss Kingscote more presentable. I don’t think that his being a little countrified would have mattered to her else.”

As a supplement to all other interests and entertainments, Mrs. Sundon and Lady Bell had little Caro to play with—to plan for with the deepest seriousness, to build castles in the air for with the highest hopefulness.

But Mrs. Sundon was different from many mothers. Mrs. Sundon not only did not expect Lady Bell to be engrossed with her little daughter, Mrs. Sundon herself would have thought it exceedingly ill-judged and

ill-bred to bring forward the child, and cause her to fill the first place in the circle, forcing every other interest and satisfaction to give way to Caro's interest and satisfaction.

No, little Caro, while she was dearly prized and petted, was kept quite in her proper and purely subordinate sphere, and that under wholesome discipline, and was decidedly a happier as well as a more modest and artless child then and afterwards in consequence of her mother's public spirit in combination with her common sense..

Mrs. Sundon would not permit Caro, unless it were absolutely unavoidable, to interfere with a single study or pursuit, though the mother cared for the child incessantly, and spared no thought or pains upon her, from consecrating to Miss Caro's wardrobe Mrs. Sundon's most exquisite needlework, to being the child's first teacher in health, and nurse in sickness. Mrs. Sundon would not allow Caro's presence in the morning-room—the company-room of the house, except at stated and limited

intervals. Mrs. Sundon put an interdict on Caro and her nurse being a drag on walking and riding excursions.

Mrs. Sundon did not carry Caro to any public place whatever, but did not on that account withdraw from public places. Mrs. Sundon had an old-fashioned notion that society and her friends had a claim upon her, just as Caro had a claim, and though Caro's claim, as her mother delighted to acknowledge, was the greater, Mrs. Sundon did not conceive that it ought on that account to swallow up the smaller. Mrs. Sundon sent Caro to bed betimes, and would not suffer this, or other excellent rules to be infringed on any pretence.

The desirable result was twofold, Caro from her earliest infancy was one of the healthiest, most natural, and "prettily behaved" of children. Mrs. Sundon had the reward of being assured that the child was regarded by all the friends of the family as a boon to be welcomed, and not as a bore or plague to be endured.

So summer suns and winter moons rose and set on the house at Summerhill, and the two friends were "Bell" and "Sunny," like sisters to each other.

"Oh, Bell, this peaceful, rational, God-fearing time is good after the distractions of passion and the storms of life," Mrs. Sundon would say, stifling all yearning in her voice, and setting her strong will to make the best of the alleviations of her lot.

"Yes, Sunny," Lady Bell would answer brightly. "I get a better gardener every month. Our place will be a spectacle next year, only the French honeysuckle don't smell like our common honeysuckle, exactly as lupins are not sweet as blossoming beans. I am improving in my drawing. I propose to try painting when the weather will allow. Mayne in Lumley is to come out and give me open-air lessons. I shall paint our Caro nursing her foot in its red shoe under an apple-tree—you shall see what you shall see. But now I must tie on my hood, and run down the lane to Goody Amos's, with

the plaster for her burn. Don't forget that there is a puppet-show in the town-hall, which we promised to attend this afternoon, before drinking a dish of tea, and staying for a bit of supper with Captain Craddock and his wife."

Very busy was Lady Bell—the true secret of happiness. Yet, walking home that same evening, escorted by the gallant Captain and the Summerhill man with a lantern, Lady Bell fell behind Mrs. Sundon and her cavalier, and began dreaming under the stars.

The dreams were not in the style of Dr. Young, though Lady Bell had been lately reading his "Night Thoughts," and admiring them greatly, as everybody admired them then.

The dreams implied rather a vague sense of waiting and of want, and of stirring in the unfathomable depths even of a girl's nature. Was unruffled tranquillity, after all, the secret of life's best fulfilment?—whether was it worse to have been torn by

warring passions like Mrs. Sundon, or that passion should never be awakened in the dead calm within? Might not the last be a greater loss to Lady Bell than the first had proved to her friend?

Was Lady Bell to pass through life and have adventures, be sad and glad, poor and in comparative affluence, friendless and with many friends, a wife and a widow, and her heart still remain void of a history?

CHAPTER V.

BOW BELLS AND THE FAMILY IN CLEVELAND COURT.

BELL," said Mrs. Sundon one morning, looking up from a letter which she had been reading, "here is something for you. The Sundons of Sundon Green, who have always been on good terms with me, write to invite us to pay them a visit in town, as they have taken a house in Cleveland Court, St. James's, for the winter and spring. What have I to do with town sights and gaieties till Caro is a finished young lady? But your day is only beginning. This invitation is the very thing for you, since I hate to think of you being moped up here continually."

Lady Bell protested that she did not pine for change, and that to spend her life with her beloved, excellent, agreeable Sunny ought to be more than enough for her, as it would at one time have been beyond her wildest wishes.

But Mrs. Sundon was bent on the change for Lady Bell. "You have no friends of your own to take you out," Mrs. Sundon pursued the theme, "but Lady Sundon will be quite pleased and proud to usher into the great world a young lady of title above that of a country baronet's wife. She is a worthy, cordial soul, in spite of weakness for rank, and will be really kind to you."

Lady Bell tried to look indifferent, but her eyes sparkled, and Mrs. Sundon was resolute in carrying out the proposal. Nevertheless, Lady Bell was sentimental and almost rueful the night before she was to start for town, to which happily the Mayor of Lumley was bound in order to figure in a deputation, and Lady Bell with a young waiting-woman who was to be about her person, was

to make the journey with the Mayor in his semi-official capacity.

“Caro will have forgotten me in three months,” reflected Lady Bell a little disconsolately as she sat idle, for a wonder, in the bright, pleasant room. “Goody Martin may have been carried off to a better world with her cough and rheumatism. Master Charles may have got his colours, and have marched to t’other end of this world, and been engaged in an ‘affair,’ as the newspapers call it, like the one at Lexington which we were reading of. Your imitation Japan screens will be finished, but I shan’t have seen every stage of the process.”

“You won’t miss much there, Bell,” said Mrs. Sundon.

Lady Bell continued her catalogue. “You will have read out Plutarch’s Lives, and I shall not have had the advantage of hearing your remarks as you went along. The spring will have come back, and be well established, but I shall have taken a leap over the first snowdrops, crocuses, primroses,

and violets. I wonder if I shall gain enough to make up for the loss? I begin to wonder even if I shall be permitted to come back, and find everything as I left it here, after I have been so mad as to quit, of my own free will, our dear, sweet home?"

"It is not in that you need fear change," asserted Mrs. Sundon cheerfully, "if you come back to us unchanged yourself, Bell, that is the question."

"Oh, as to that there is no fear," declared Lady Bell confidently, recovering her spirit. "I must ever be true to Summerhill. But ah, Sunny!" she relapsed the next moment, "we have been so happy here—so much happier than I ever was before. Does it not seem doubtful whether the same happiness can be again in this troublous world?"

"If not the same, then let us trust that there may be happiness of another kind to supply the place of the past happiness," Mrs. Sundon encouraged the girl. "Come, Bell, I will not have you low on this our last night."

Lady Bell forgot all her forebodings when she found herself drawing near to London again.

A hundred years ago, when communication was slow and difficult, and knowledge little spread, the civilisation of the country centered peculiarly in the capital. It was the source of every public movement, the winter seat of the court, the high place of noble and splendid society, the chosen resort of wisdom, wit, learning, and accomplishments under every guise. It had its gross evils, no doubt, but so great were its counterbalancing advantages and its general irresistible fascination, that even the most modest and sober moralists and philosophers, of all ages and both sexes, sighed longingly to enjoy the benefits and charms of town life.

And Lady Bell was town bred. The very smoke smelt sweet, and the cries sounded melodious to her ears.

“Oh, sir!” she addressed the Mayor as they were drawing near the great city,

while she was unable to resist putting her head out of the coach windows. "Let us try to catch the first sound of Bow bells; let us make my woman Rogers hear them. They do jingle so tunefully, one cannot wonder that they caused Whittington to return, even without the cat."

Lady Bell's arrant native propensity for the life, the stir, and the variety of the town, had only been subdued into a grateful, intelligent acknowledgment that the country also had its charms, it was not routed out of her. She was inclined to return to her first love.

Then, to add to the gladness of Lady Bell's return, she was coming back under different and happier auspices. Instead of the helpless, penniless child, driven off to the cold welcome of St. Bevis's, Lady Bell was an independent woman; and though she was not a rich young widow, as Mrs. Greenwood and Sneyd had once hoped for her, she was a young widow, with a modest but sufficient jointure, going to her friend's

friends, who were to consider it a credit and satisfaction to entertain her.

The members of the Sundon family, who were in Cleveland Court, St. James's, were Sir Peter and Lady Sundon and her two stepdaughters. The only son of the family was a boy at school.

Sir Peter was sixty-four, lank and lantern-jawed, and ailing, as his appearance betokened. He had come up to town to be under some of the medical faculty there.

Lady Sundon was fifty-five, as hale as Sir Peter was the reverse, one of those hearty, brisk women who did not require rouge, she was so rosy in her matronly roundness of cheek; and did not want a stick, or the page's arm, she was still so active in her fulness of figure.

The Misses Sundon were between twenty and thirty, daughters of Sir Peter by a former marriage; while the son and heir was Lady Sundon's only child. The Misses Sundon were young women to whom it seemed a matter of necessity to wear the

highest heads and heels of the period, in order to lend distinction to their poverty of form and general colourlessness.

“You’ll be after the sights, Lady Bell,” said Sir Peter at supper. “Ah! they ain’t worth the trouble and fatigue they give you,” he ended, shaking his head, as he called the grapes sour which he could no longer reach.

“Bother! Sir Peter,” cried Lady Sundon, “to go and daunt my Lady Bell, and she as fresh as a daisy, and as nimble as a young colt. I’ll warrant she’ll be up to all the racketing, from the Queen’s caudle-drinking to the opening of Ranelagh, which we can cram into the next two or three months.”

“Not so bad as that, Lady Sundon,” said Lady Bell; “but though I’ve seen the sights, save it may be the newest, I confess I’ve come up to try a taste of town gaities again.”

“And do you think such a fine young woman as you are will be let off with a

taste, even if that were to content you, when every maccaroni left will be wild to make you take your fill of pleasure."

"La ! Lady Sundon," interposed Miss Lyddy Sundon, who, in company with her sister, was as die-away as her stepmother was jolly, that they might thus establish a claim to refinement and a presumptive case of superficial grievance, against Lady Sundon. For somebody had impressed upon the young women, that there must be hardships where there were step-relations, and Miss Lyddy and her sister had languidly taken up the idea as a source of interest which could not otherwise be found in their ordinary persons, characters, and prosperous lot. "Who would care for such rude draughts ? Only a milkmaid or a ploughman could stand them. Polite people like Lady Bell soon have enough."

"A fig for your philosophy, Lyddy," protested the elder woman ; "I never saw you abstemious in your draughts, and sure I never stint you. As for milkmaids, young

women are very much alike, whether they be milkmaids or countesses, I take it—no offence, Lady Bell. I do love a noble name and a title, all the same.”

“There is no offence,” Lady Bell replied with a smile.

While Miss Lyddy insinuated a word of hurt feelings—“I wish your ladyship would explain what you mean by not seeing me abstemious in my draughts. I hope I know what a delicate woman owes to her nerves.”

“Sister,”—Miss Sundon soothed the injured fine lady solemnly,—“Lady Sundon does not mean to speak unkind. She knows that we take after our papa, and have not her rude health and high spirits, which make her love her joke to the degree that she may certainly mislead Lady Bell Trevor.”

“Oh dear, no,” denied Lady Sundon with careless candour, “Lady Bell can see for herself that you are two poor creatures not able for much, though after all you are fit for more than you think for, only you have got it into your heads that it is not tonish

to be natural and merry as grigs, which I was when I was like you. But it is all fudge, and you are clean out there, as Lady Bell can tell you, and as I could have told you myself if you would have listened to me. Ain't the great ladies madder than the country lasses? Han't I seen, since I came to town, when I had ridden out to Twickenham, her Grace of Devonshire marching in regimentals at the head of a company of fencibles? Now, I ain't so bad as that, Sir Peter," Lady Sundon challenged her valetudinarian husband.

"No, nor need be, my lady, so long as my bridle is on your neck," retorted Sir Peter dryly.

"You must have mistook," maintained the two Misses Sundon in a breath; "her Grace could never have done anything half so shocking. What! march miles on a filthy miry road, in the company of hundreds of common men, followed up by the rag, tag and bob-tail of their wives and children; having no rest and refreshment, unless she

could swig her can of ale with the fellows at the ale-house doors ! ”

“ I ain’t mistaken—I can credit my own eyes,”—Lady Sundon kept her point,—“ and to march in regimentals, with a regiment of common men as honest as their betters, was none so shocking, after the stories I have heard told of card-playing on Sunday evenings, Sir Peter, of masquerading, of appointments in Belsize Park, of Fleet marriages—Parliament hath forbidden the last—you have lost that chance, girls.”

“ Madam, would you ever liken us to it ? ” gasped the step-daughters.

“ Polly, your tongue wags too freely,” remonstrated her husband, “ and I won’t have you run Lady Bell and the girls off their feet. Besides, what is to become of me ? ” he asked in a dolorous tone ; “ am I to be left to Jebb’s gallipots and James’s powders, while you are frisking about all day and all night ? Is that what you call acting the part of a good wife, and training

up these daughters of ours in the way they should go?"

"Oh, no fears—no fears of you, above all, my dear," Sir Peter's lively helpmate reassured him. "You'll be seen to, whatever comes of it. Were you ever forgotten? Indeed, to suppose so, is the unkindest cut you've given me and the girls this age." And then, failing to be cut by the cut, Lady Sundon proceeded to plan a party of pleasure.

CHAPTER VI.

A GAY YOUNG MADAM.

WITH so light-hearted a head of the house, just held in check by the mild selfishness of Sir Peter and the mild grumbling of his daughters, Lady Bell could not have a dull time of it during her stay in town.

No doubt there were the drawbacks which are inevitable in life, and which make the realisation of our dearest wishes fall short of the expectation.

There was the tender pang with which Lady Bell, having hurried to the spot on the first opportunity, looked on the outside of her old home, Lady Lucie's lodgings in Bruton Street, occupied by strangers.

There was the pensive wonder and regret with which, forgetting the changes in herself, Lady Bell found that even a few years had been able to make havoc in Lady Lucie's circle; so many of the members were old, like Lady Lucie, and had soon followed her in death; while the younger individuals, engrossed with their personal cares, had all but forgotten little Lady Bell, who had so faithfully remembered them, and met her again with the indifference of exhausted acquaintance.

Strange moving vicissitudes had overtaken some of the old familiar figures.

But though they startled and affected Lady Bell for the moment, the victims had not been so much to her, that their memory should continue to weigh upon her mind, and the blanks which their absence made, at first, were soon amply supplied.

In like manner, if the very topics of conversation were changed, and nobody seemed to remember the old Princess of Wales's death, or the failure of Fordyce's Bank,

Lady Bell could catch the new cue and speak of the American war with the best.

The Sundons, of Sundon Green, were people of good account in their own county. Sir Peter, invalided though he was, had considerable political influence in the heat of the strife raging between Tory and Whig.

Lady Sundon was generally popular, even among more fastidious and exacting people. Her good-humoured blitheness, dashed with coarseness and worldly-mindedness, had the manifest advantage that it did not rank high enough among the virtues to form a reproach to the halting virtue of anybody.

But Lady Bell possessed in herself, independent of her host and hostess, almost all the elements calculated to insure a season's success. She was a complete novelty, appearing at her age, after years of rustication. She had the benefit of acknowledged birth and breeding, to which Lady Sundon led the way, in paying open, honest enough homage, as she frankly confessed herself Lady Bell's social inferior, while she dis-

played as frankly her pride in taking Lady Bell about. Above all, Lady Bell was lovely, with a dainty, arch loveliness, which her youthful widowhood rendered peculiarly piquant.

The presence of the Misses Sundon in Lady Bell's company was simply the putting of two foils beside the little lady, while the foils were useful in dividing responsibility with her, and in rendering her security doubly secure.

Lady Bell was not rich to bribe suitors, but she was so far well off as to make the pursuit of her, regarding her merely as an object of attraction and fashion, comparatively safe to the gallant fops, wits, and idle men of wealth and rank lounging or rioting through the hours, and ever ready to welcome a fresh interest.

As it happened, just at that moment, a belle's throne was vacant, after the conjoint reign of the three great belles of late seasons.

Lady Mary Somerset was swiftly paying

the penalty of a "wasp waist," and sickening to death under the burden of the honours of the Marchioness of Granby.

Lady Harriet Stanhope had become Lady Harriet Foley, and was on the way with her husband to Newmarket and ruin.

Of Lady Betty Compton, whose style and title remained unchanged, it might be alleged, much as it was said with regard to Aristides the Just, that the fashionable world had waxed weary of the name and fame of Lady Betty Compton.

Foolish Lady Betty! she ought to have inaugurated a change of some kind betimes, and married or died after the example of her sister queens, for there is nothing so mercurial as the wind of opinion which brings about the installation or deposition of such an airy sovereign.

And now Lady Bell Trevor grew the rage until she was as universal a toast in town as she had been in humble provincial circles.

There is no denying that Lady Bell enjoyed her success, and the writing of it to

Mrs. Sundon, in the most off-hand, unsophisticated manner.

The pleasures of the town, which might be vapid and worse—tainted to more thoughtful, experienced people, were very fresh and sparkling to Lady Bell; she found a thousand things to engage and delight her at the opera, the play-houses, the Court revisited, the *ridottos*, the private assemblies. It was no trouble and distress, but great pleasure to her to pay visits, attend auctions, and go a-shopping three mornings out of four. It was so entire a change, though it was like native air, that she returned to it with renewed zest. She might, probably she would, tire of it after a time, but she could not tire of it very soon.

And Lady Bell found it highly agreeable to be followed, besieged, even persecuted by the attentions of those men, some of them distinguished—whether for good or evil, or both, as elegant scholars, as daring travellers, as dead shots (when the game was not shy partridges or timid deer, but

fellow-men, scowling in deadly enmity, pistol in hand, at twelve paces distance), as bold riders, and betters, and three-bottle men who, drunk or sober, could remain masters of the situation, and make themselves listened to in the House, and out of it, compared to the least brilliant of whom Master Charles of Nutfield was but a comely, kindly rustic and ignoramus.

The great proportion of these men were little in earnest in their adulation; but Lady Bell was quite aware of the fact, and did not mind it. Her own heart was not touched; she could meet her admirers on equal terms, and like a child playing with fire, she feared no danger. She liked, though it meant next to nothing, to be besieged for her hand in a minuet or a cotillon, for the honour of serving her with tea in the box of a coffee-room after the opera or the theatre, or of handing her to Lady Sundon's coach. She did not object to being spoken to, albeit the terms were exaggerated, of the felicity of being in her

presence, and the despair of feeling her absence. She did not believe it, of course, but it was a little intoxicating at the same time.

Lady Sundon, who had not enjoyed any reflected triumphs on her stepdaughters' account, was in the greatest glee at being chaperon to so favoured a young lady.

Mrs. Sundon, who had been brought up to the contemplation of these triumphs, considered them quite legitimate, and viewed them as the necessary finish to the rearing of a woman of quality, and the mode by which her future was most frequently rounded off and settled.

Lady Bell could have got into almost any set. Though she had no claims to dabbling in literature, she would have been granted admittance to the assemblies of the blues—in the drawing-rooms of Lady Charleville, Mrs. Boscawen, and the great Mrs. Montague. But the truth was that Lady Bell did not altogether appreciate classical poses and coquettings with the muse, and did not

care for the fine gentlemen who were so sensitive about her reading their poems, and the great ladies who were so fond of hearing themselves speak.

Lady Bell had once taken a prominent part in an election, yet she was as guileless as most young women of eighteen of comprehending or caring for politics, unless, indeed, they bore on such sentimental, sensational questions as the imprisonment of the Queen of Denmark—the marriage of the Pretender—or Lord Mansfield's decision that no slave could be sent back from England to the chain and the lash of a taskmaster. Still, that trifling deficiency might not have prevented her from entering the ranks of the fair enthusiasts, who, in the vacancy or the usurped possession of heart and mind, and in the craving for excitement which circumstances fostered, were already short-sighted partisans and reckless agitators for and against American independence, in sympathy with or in hostility to French philosophers. Lady Bell would

have proved an invaluable acquisition even to the sisters Devonshire and Duncannon and to Mrs. Crew, who would have opened their exclusive arms to her, for they forgot to be rivals in their fervent worship at the one shrine of their half-splendid, half-brutified idol, who could guide alike a steed and a state.

But Lady Bell shrank from the wild devotion to the buff and the blue, or to any other colour of the rainbow. She contented herself with marvelling at Anne, Duchess of Northumberland, haranguing the populace from a window in Covent Garden, on the election of her brother-in-law, Lord Percy, and with freely owning that this performance far surpassed any of her, Lady Bell Trevor's, election achievements.

Lady Bell was too young, too pretty, and at once too rich and too poor, to take to the card-tables, which were still more enthralling than the hustings to their votaries, and which were the conspicuous accompaniments of every entertainment. She might

have had gambling in her blood, through her relationship to Squire Godwin, but her life at St. Bevis's and Mrs. Sundon's experience had destroyed the constitutional predilection.

Lady Bell was instinctively wise in not allying herself so closely to any circle as to shut herself out from others, and in preferring to shine as a charming visitor to each in turn. By this species of discretion, as much as by her graces, Lady Bell won the approbation of the master of assemblies to aristocratic London, whose notice was honour, and his approbation the seal of taste. The exquisite, rattling-boned, grimacing Mr. Walpole condescended to commend her, asked to be presented to her, found out she was his cousin a hundred times removed, and graciously invited her to the next theatrical representations at Strawberry Hill.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING AN ACQUAINTANCE AT THE PANTHEON.

LADY BELL was with the Sundons at the Pantheon, which was in winter what "dear delightful Ranelagh" was in its season, to every town letter-writer of the generation.

Here, too, was to be met a considerable amount of picturesqueness, variety, and freedom in an age which alternated between excessive ceremonial and bursts of licence. All the world could go to the Pantheon as to Ranelagh, and, if in consequence there were, on the one hand, greater openings to folly and vice, there were, on the other, better provisions for rational and innocent pleasure, than in more private and restricted places of entertainment.

The women who groaned under the barbarous encumbrances and entanglements of ruffled sacques, and immensely high and extravagant dressed "heads," at other fashionable gatherings, could come in an elegant undress to the Pantheon as well as to Ranelagh, walk about, listen to concerts, and form little social parties in the underground tea-room. There was a charming demi-toilette for such places, of gowns with worked neckerchiefs, and little hats over the hair, hanging down in curls upon the shoulders. While the use of this privilege at a resort rendered so brilliant, was not held to preclude distinctive touches of gay knots of ribands, fans, and sparkling jewels.

The gentlemen were not permitted the same relaxation in their obligations. They must have the triangular hats mostly carried under the arm when the hair was fully powdered, the silk stockings, and the lace cravats. None save defiant bucks of high rank ventured to violate the traditions of the Pantheon or Ranelagh by presenting

themselves in morning buckskins and short coats.

Lady Bell and the Sundons had arrived too early, Lady Sundon having a country mania for being in time at public places, to have collected any stray members of what Lady Sundon called Lady Bell's "pack."

The party with their single male attendant, a hobble-de-hoy nephew of Sir Peter's, had gone down-stairs to pass the interval in drinking tea, till the main body of the company should arrive, and the tuning of the musical instruments end. As other first-comers followed the Sundons' example, Lady Sundon kept on the out-look to hail acquaintances.

Lady Bell was resting and anticipating, with lips apart and a flickering smile, what hero of her train would turn up soonest.

Miss Sundon was pensively helping Miss Lyddy Sundon to the last macaroon, on which the hobble-de-hoy squire had cast a covetous eye, and remarking with a sigh, "Sister, we need not have been so hurried

as to take away the little appetites we have, scarcely a soul is to be seen. I understand it is the correct thing not to come till near ten o'clock. But you and I must do as we are bidden."

"And a good thing for you too, girls," proclaimed Lady Sundon, in her slightly view-halloo voice. "What! wait till near ten and miss all the company coming, the best part of the pleasure, and the half of the concert—though I can't say I care for their Italian squalling; give me one of Lady Bell's lessons on the spinnet, or a good English chorus. But my likings are neither here nor there. And no, say I, I shan't be cheated of half my treat, such as it is. There is somebody I ought to know. Heyday! it is my own cousin, Harry Fane, come up from his ship at Portsmouth."

Lady Sundon whisked off her seat, unimpeded by her size or her years, as if she had been a girl of sixteen, and favoured by the thinness of the company, succeeded in overtaking and tapping with her fan the

shoulder of a gentleman in blue and white uniform, whom she arrested in his course, and brought back with her, as a reward of virtue and early habits.

“See what I’ve got by coming betimes, girls; sure, we might never have set eyes on each other if the rooms had been full,” Lady Sundon cried exultingly, and then she rattled on in one long sentence, with breaks for breath. “You know my step-daughters, Harry, and this is Lady Bell Trevor, a friend of Mrs. Sundon, of Chevely (at least, she used to be of Chevely, poor soul! before Greg Sundon went all to the dogs), who does us the honour of being with us this winter. All agog Lady Bell keeps us, I can tell you, so that neither she, nor we, can get peace for you men.”

“Pray don’t give me so bad a character, madam,” objected Lady Bell demurely.

“It has been the same tune,” maintained Lady Sundon, “since she was Lady Bell Etheredge, Earl Etheredge’s daughter (I hope you are up in your peerage, Harry);

she had to marry old Squire Trevor, for peace, when she was a chit of fifteen, but he is dead, and she is as bad as ever."

"Do you mean to fright your cousin, till he refuse to be presented to me, Lady Sundon?" Lady Bell cut short the tale of her conquests.

"He ain't such a lubberly coward as to deprive himself of what blue jackets, as well as red coats, are fighting for; if he were, he should get no harbour from me. Lady Bell Trevor, Captain Fane of the *Thunderbomb*. He may pull a long face at our frivolity, and pretend to find fault with us for being children playing with toys, but he is not such a bad fellow at bottom—as some of these misanthropes—misogynists, what-d'ye call-'ems."

"I am obliged to you for the character of a sage, cousin," replied the gentleman with perfect gravity, "Lady Bell Trevor, will you permit me, so soon after being introduced, to take the liberty of pitying you, if my cousin is serious in her account."

“A humorist,” Lady Bell commented to herself under her breath, “an animal that I detest, though I understand my dear Mrs. Sundon has rather a fancy for the species—there is no accounting for tastes—neither is the specimen handsome to excuse him for any form of conceit. I dare say he is clever in some dry disagreeable way.”

Captain Fane of the *Thunderbomb*, thus apostrophized and reviewed by bright keen eyes, was a young man of twenty-eight years. Although he was not strictly handsome, he had a good figure, which his naval uniform set off, and his face—with a thick cogitative nose, a wrinkle between the eyebrows, and a tendency to squareness in the jaws—was lit up by a pair of fine eyes, and a pleasantness in his smile when he did smile, which was rather too seldom.

Captain Fane accepted Lady Sundon's invitation to join her party; he was on very good terms with his cousin, though she announced to Lady Bell, “he takes me off at no allowance,” and in accordance with

this communication Lady Sundon was continually nodding her head, and snapping her fan in mock agreement with, or smart protest at, Captain Fane's strictures.

The gentleman was indemnifying himself for his concession to kindred feminine influence by the private reflection, "Here is a fine lady of fashion whom my 'merry wife' of a cousin has bagged by some chance. I'd better improve the opportunity of studying the latest shore and town follies, grafted on a woman's wilfulness and caprice. Heartless young dowager (why, she looks little more than a child!) to have married an 'old Squire Trevor' and buried him to boot, and to be looking out for his successor, I warrant, with what she's been cunning enough to secure of the defunct Squire's goods. It is a bad, as well as a mad world, my masters; but of all things I can't abide an artful young woman, and this one looks so artless (which makes the art much worse) in the middle of her airs and graces."

"Harry don't think we women have a

pinch of sense," Lady Sundon was saying, "besides the five senses we can't help having. As for him, I tell him that except that he's as sober as a judge (and he a sailor!), and is fond of books and instruments, having his cabin fitted up with them like a pedagogue's den, he's a regular chip of some of the horrid old woman-hating admirals. You are a woman of spirit, Lady Bell. I do wish that you would serve it out to him, or take him in hand and do something to improve him."

"Pardon me, Lady Sundon, I have neither time nor talent in that way," Lady Bell excused herself with one of her airs, not approving of this proposal on so short an acquaintance, to the cynical, saucy fellow's face.

"And I should not be worth the trouble, Lady Bell," the gentleman hastened to explain; "I am afraid that I am incorrigible to any fair, fine lady's pains."

Though neither of them exactly meant it, they were both so disdainful, that it was a

good deal like flinging down gauntlets on the first brush of their introduction—a mutual challenge, which was so far owing to Lady Sundon's blundering cordiality.

“Oh! not so bad as that, Harry,” exclaimed the good lady, who really liked her cousin, as she liked pickles or the preserved ginger, with regard to which he had once been so mindful as to bring her a jar from the West Indies. “I am quite convinced, Lady Bell, that he needs only to be smiled and frowned upon by one of our sex, and to hang on our smiles and tremble at our frowns, to be properly humbled, and made a mighty agreeable fellow of.”

“Indeed, ma'am,” answered Lady Bell, in a tone which sounded very much as if she had said, “He may, or he may not; I am sure I don't care.”

“You are wrong, cousin,” replied Captain Fane quickly, “I don't pretend to be worse or better than my neighbours, certainly; but I do profess that where neither my judgment nor my conscience is addressed, I

am not particularly susceptible to the wiles either of smiles or frowns, or for that matter of tears."

"Oh, you wretch!" cried out even the Misses Sundon.

"Why, what would you have?" remonstrated Captain Fane; "you ladies must submit to the fact that there are some ill-conditioned rebels against the rule of blandishments, while sea-horses of all horses are the worst to tame. However, a truce to me and my nature, a monstrously uninteresting subject to introduce, Lady Sundon; what have you been doing with yourself lately?"

"Oh, we have been doing what we could when Sir Peter would spare us, so as to make the town and society the better even for my blowsy phiz; but I've had my day, Harry, I've had my day. We've seen Mr. Garrick take leave of the stage in the *Wonder*, and the new Italian singer—what's-his-name—make his first appearance in *Artaxerxes*. We've heard Dr. Dodd preach

in aid of the society for the recovery of the drowned, and been present at one of Madam Montague's dinners to the chimney-sweeps. We've walked in the Mall and Kensington Gardens whenever the sun would keep us in countenance, which was not too often, when the sulky rogue let the Thames be froze at Mortlake during the late fall of snow. We've been both to the Queen's House and the Mansion House, and to ever so many dinners and routs. We've even had our share of the new sickness, the influenza, which is all the vogue, though we could have dispensed with that token of fashion. I could not tell you all that we've been and done, Cousin Harry."

"I think you've told me pretty well, Cousin Sundon," quoth Harry. "I almost hesitate to propose that you should take a stroll, you must all be so knocked up; no wonder that Miss Sundon and Miss Lyddy look as if a breath of air would blow them away."

"A fiddlestick for their being blown

away ! They're quite hearty if they would only think it. Lady Bell makes no complaint, and she is always as fresh as paint when a new pleasure is spoke of. She is something like a girl ; I have no patience with girls being vapoured, sir, it is a reproach on you men, if you understood it. Girls were different when I was young, and I ain't vapoured now that I am old. If you were to cut and shuffle in a hornpipe, like a Jack tar on the boards, I could caper the steps of 'Joan Saunderson' or 'Nancy Dawson' back again. Since you won't, let us go the round, and see and be seen by all means ; what is life without a bit of pleasure ?"

CHAPTER VIII.

OPINIONS DIFFER.

AS the party went up-stairs, and strolled about amongst other animated groups, admiring what were reckoned the Gothic portions of the Pantheon, listening to the rising strains of the orchestra, which still admitted the ring of laughing voices—buxom Lady Sundon grew radiant. “Now, ain’t this nice, Harry?” she demanded triumphantly; “ain’t it something to come on shore for—worth years of the sloppy, draggle-tailed country?”

“As to nice, the word is too vague. I’d as lief not pledge myself to what you mean by niceness,” he told her; “and I own to being rather fonder of green fields than

filthy streets, after a long tack of blue waves."

"But this ain't filthy streets, Harry. Now, I shall think you right down cross and contrary, if you refuse to admit that the Pantheon, at least, takes your fancy."

"Then, not to mortify you, madam, the Pantheon itself is not half so silly or so bad as many places of public and private entertainment that I've been to in my life. If I were to stay on shore, and in London, I should not mind coming sometimes to the Pantheon."

"I dare say you shouldn't—your humble servant, Harry, for the condescension!"

"Especially if I were to come across such a man as Admiral Byron," continued Captain Fane, bowing low to a bluff, elderly gentleman in passing. "He played the man when he was no more than a middy, young sir"—Captain Fane pointed the application by looking over his shoulder and addressing Sir Peter's nephew, walking between the Misses Sundon, and instantly beginning to

swell with wrath because his tender years were hinted at—"He was a castaway on a South Sea Island, and he managed to survive five years of hardship unparalleled in our day, among savages. There is somebody to look at, worth a hundred of your beaux and belles."

"And han't I stared the man out," declared Lady Sundon, "till he thinks there's a hole in his epaulette, or a paper pinned on his back?"

"It isn't the luck of every one to be a castaway on a South Sea Island, and to learn a lesson from savages," said Lady Bell. "Beaux and belles can't help their want of luck. You should be fair, Captain Fane."

"I'll try, Lady Bell," he promised, "if you'll point out to me one man or woman of your fine fashionables—remember, I don't say civilians, I hope I'm not such a swaggering fire-eater as to confine merit to one or both of the services—who, in his or her different circumstances, has shown half the ingenuity and energy, not to say resignation,

which my friend the Admiral was privileged, as you put it not incorrectly, to display."

"Oh, come, sir!" cried Lady Bell with spirit, dropping her assumption of meekness, "I shall not have far to seek to confute your argument, and I shall take a woman in order to cover you with confusion. True, I don't say she has kindled a fire with flints, or dug up roots with her fingers, or knocked down birds with a stick; but I conclude that you—an educated gentleman—consider ingenuity and energy may be well bestowed in other respects than in relieving mere gross, bodily wants."

"I grant you that, Lady Bell."

"Do you see the lady in the silver gauze?—not there, and that is not silver gauze, that is white brocade, while the wearer is only charming Lady Hesketh. No, here, the slight young lady in the silver gauze, with the fine hair in a wave above her forehead, and the high aquiline nose—do you know what she is famous for?"

“No ; I must admit my ignorance.”

“Not for her beauty, although you may see she is beautiful ; not for being gallant General Conway’s daughter ; not even for being wife of my Lord Milton’s son, who has the finest wardrobe in London—finer even than thirty thousand a year will stand, folks swear ; for men can be as vain as women sometimes, and a great deal more reckless in their vanity. But Mrs. Damer puts on a mob cap and canvas apron, and with those little white hands wields mallet and chisel, as well as moulds in wax and clay. She hath done groups of animals as true as life, and busts of men and women—their speaking images. She is a great sculptor, sir, such as Mr. Bacon or Mr. Nollekens. What do you say to that ?” Lady Bell wound up her peroration by making a profound curtsy.

“It is all gospel, Harry,” Lady Sundon confirmed the account. “They tell me that pretty stylish woman is so far left to herself that she likes nothing better than muddling

among wet blocks and splinters of stone, and hewing away like any stonemason."

"I stand corrected," admitted Harry Fane honestly, addressing himself to Lady Bell. "I honour the lady both for her capacity and determination."

"And I can assure you, sir, she is not the only woman who deserves your honour for intellect and perseverance," insisted Lady Bell, woman-like, not content with the inch conceded, but proceeding to ask a yard. "Of course it is not given to many women to be endowed like Mrs. Damer, but if you knew my dear Mrs. Sundon, down at Summerhill, how wise she is, how attentive to all her duties, how regular and unwearied in her studies—well!" she broke off enthusiastically, "she shames me into solidity and steadiness. I never have a fit of the gapes, and I am in no way flighty when I am with her."

"That is a great testimony," said Captain Fane with grave abstraction, as if he were meditating on the force of the evidence.

“You provoking man!” Lady Sundon reproached him, rapping him across the fingers with her fan, while Lady Bell bit her lips with pique, and turned away indignant at being laughed at, a process to which she was not over much accustomed.

Lady Bell was too proud to pout, but she had made up her mind that she would submit to no more flouting from this impertinent, conceited sailor, when all at once he begged her pardon, said penitently and agreeably that Mrs. Sundon was at least fortunate in having such an advocate that he could take the unknown lady’s superiority on trust.

Lady Bell felt rewarded for her gallantry in fighting the humoursome sailor, when she had constrained him to soften his looks and tones, and to except not merely Mrs. Sundon but herself in his budget of criticism—if Lady Sundon had let the man alone in leaving him to his better mind, and had not, by interfering, spoilt all !

“Mercy on us!” Lady Sundon ejacu-

lated, "wonders will never cease ; my polar bear has paid a compliment !"

"Not paid a compliment—told a truth," Captain Fane had condescended to say further, quite graciously.

"Another, another, Harry ! you're a reformed man on the spot—see what a pretty woman can do—a bear that has changed its skin !" Lady Sundon had leapt too fast to a conclusion.

"I am afraid I must damp your expectation, and shock you once more," alleged Captain Fane, with a perverse twinkle in his eyes, "for I was about to add that if your Mrs. Sundon is so wondrous wise a woman, why did she go 'in the galley,' as I have understood she did ? I mean, why did she throw herself away on so dissipated a man and so inveterate a gambler as Gregory Sundon, of Chevely, whose disgrace had been so manifest and black, that he has been suffered to drop clean out of this corrupt enough gay world, as well as out of his wife's offended sight. If she was

to be particular, she should have begun sooner."

"Sir!" replied Lady Bell, with her hot young generosity firing up in every word, "I do not pretend to justify my friend in every act of her life; and for the magnanimous faith with which she trusted her precious self and her fortune to the unhappy husband who failed her, I say nothing, save that it ill becomes even so faultless and prudent a man, as I do not doubt Captain Fane is, to blame her."

"Well said—as good as a play, Lady Bell. Lady Bell, I'm proud of you," protested Lady Sundon. "Hit him hard when you're at it! Yes, indeed, you're no better than a mean scamp, though you are my own cousin, Harry; and I did not think it of you, for all your droll crustiness and carping words, till Lady Bell hath opened my eyes—to twit a fine woman with her indiscreet tenderness to one of your own ungrateful sex—as well kiss and tell. What have you to say for yourself?"

“Nothing!” answered Harry, with a little shrug of his broad shoulders, “and Lady Bell need not hit harder, seeing she has hit hard enough to floor me already. Madam, I was wrong to urge such an inconsistency in your friend. It was ill done on my part, as you said. I cannot do less than make amends to her and to you by saying that I am sorry for my unhandsome words.”

Again Lady Bell was propitiated by a new and rare flattery in finding that she could sway and subdue not a willing slave, not an indolent, careless adorer, but a restive and opinionative man. For here was one who might have had the misfortune to be a little singular to begin with, and who, after having been confined to ship-board from childhood, turned up in the smooth, accommodating world, all angles, ready-formed prepossessions and prejudices.

Under the subtle incense, Lady Bell looked at her antagonist more deliberately over her fan, and out of a pair of eyes analytically inclined.

She settled that though he was contradictory and a little abrupt and harsh in his contradictions, otherwise he was not in the least ill-mannered or boorish, but had altogether the air of a gentleman and a man of education, and was thus of the new school of naval officers. He looked also a man of sense, even of some benevolence, when he gave way to her, and was so quick and candid in the kind of courage which confessed even to so small a shortcoming as a mistaken judgment in conversation.

As Lady Bell arrived at this improved verdict, the music in chief began, and the party had to take their seats and listen.

When the concert was ended, Lady Bell was accosted and monopolized by one after another of her numerous friends, dangles, and satellites, until Lady Sundon's party quitted the Pantheon.

CHAPTER IX.

BOULTON'S COINS AND WEDGWOOD'S DISHES.

NEXT morning Captain Fane called for his cousins in Cleveland Court, to inquire after Sir Peter and propose a party which should be a compromise between his ideas and theirs.

“You seem to have been at so many sights,” Captain Fane said, “that there are only one or two left for you to see, but as you have gone hitherto with the multitude, I should not wonder though you have, without any blame to your judgments, of course, missed some choice exhibitions.” He addressed Lady Sundon at her fringe-loom and the young ladies at their tambour-frames.

“Now what may they be, Harry? We shall be vastly obliged to you for enlightening us.” Her ladyship was open to a suggestion.

“There are the exhibitions of Mr. Boulton’s new coins, medals, and machinery; and there is the show of the new Staffordshire ware which men of science and taste are flocking to.”

“Dear heart alive, are we men of science?” remonstrated Lady Sundon; “we’ve been to Cox’s museum, where an artificial bird sings, and to the place kept by the Swiss in King Street, Covent Garden, where the effigy of a boy writes, and the effigy of a girl draws, and another effigy of a young lady—the marrow of Lyddy there—plays the piano; and that is enough science for me, if indeed, it ain’t the black art, which it is uncommonly like. I thought you were going to tell of a fresh batch of wild Indians, with their paint and war-dances; or of the last caught syren, with her gills serving as curls, and

a fin rising on the top of her head for that matter instead of our present fashionable 'heads'—odd! ain't it, that the syrens should have the fashions at the bottom of the sea?—or of a new fortune-teller."

"What could put all these foolish things into your head, my lady?" complained Captain Fane.

" 'These are the least the man can have in his eye,' I said to myself," she told him for her explanation. "I am extraordinary disappointed. No, sir; you are a clever dog in your way, and not a bad dog at bottom, since your bark is worse than your bite, though you have a little of the bulldog in you too when your temper is fairly roused, but you have no notion how to please and divert ladies, that's clear."

"Very likely I have not," answered Captain Fane a little glumly, "but sure I did you no disparagement when I evened you to what delights men of parts."

"No, indeed, Captain Fane," spoke up

Lady Bell, her natural and high-bred sweetness in a ferment at the reception which had been accorded even by good-natured Lady Sundon to the young sailor's overture, which was a little too affable in its tone, perhaps, but was obliging and kindly meant.

Farther Lady Bell hated to think that Captain Fane would suppose women in general, and she in particular, had not minds above the vulgar marvels which Lady Sundon had quoted.

“If you will forgive me for saying so, Lady Sundon,” Lady Bell gave her opinion, “you are in the wrong box. All the first people in town, ladies as well as gentlemen, are running to look at the medallions and vases. They were inspected by their majesties in person t’other day, and the Queen gave an order for ornaments to the chimney-pieces of her private rooms. I know my Mrs. Sundon would not forgive me if I returned to the country without having set eyes on these works. I don’t

pretend to be very wise myself, but I hope I have no objection to improving my mind, and that I have sufficient patriotism to be proud of the growing manufactures of my country."

"Upon my word, Lady Bell, you put an old woman to shame," exclaimed Lady Sundon, always ready to admire whatever Lady Bell said or did, and yet in earnest in her admiration. "Hear her! a young modish beauty evening herself to self-improvement and patriotism like any wizened bookworm. Have your way, child; I am sure it is a most creditable way, and I am glad Captain Fane has been so mindful as to put it in your power. But as I am a score and more of years too old for improving my mind or patronising my country, and my inclination ain't in that line, I shall devote the morning to dancing attendance on my Sir Peter. It will help to keep the poor soul sweet, and gain me liberty for some more enticing occasion."

“I think we shall be able to get on without you, cousin.”

“Get away with you, fellow. You don’t want a chaperon, Lady Bell, you yourself are the most charming chaperon in Lon’on; while poor Nancy and Lyddy there, that are nigh ten years older than you, never having had the luck to be married, can’t stir abroad without me jogging at their elbows; though, gracious me! my office is very much a sinecure so far as the men are concerned.”

“Good heavens! Lady Sundon, how can you tell such stories about sister’s age and mine?” screamed Miss Lyddy. “As for men, if we were willing to grin and ogle—” she bit her tongue in time to prevent herself adding, “and to marry men older than our father—”

“I don’t know that the grinning would do it, Lyddy,” observed the incorrigible Lady Sundon, shaking her head; “you haven’t teeth for grins, neither you nor Nancy, they’re too black. But what do

you say, girls, about this morning's doings? Is it to be 'hey!' for Lady Bell and cousin Harry, with their pots and mugs, or 'hey!' for a dosing and darning match at home."

"Gracious, madam," interposed Miss Sundon peevishly, "how can you phrase it that we should cry 'hey!' for anything; though I am certain we are as fond of being instructed and entertained as Lady Bell or anybody."

"I wish you would look sprightlier about it then, Nancy," recommended Lady Sundon, "for who would come to the house, I should like to know, if they were treated to nothing but dismal—from Sir Peter's pains to your and Lyddy's quarrels with the weather for taking your hair out of the curl—and not a shade of relief from a joke or laugh to shake one's sides and warm one's blood like a sip of cherry brandy?"

When the party set out, Lady Bell took care to qualify her support of the expedition by turning over Captain Fane to walk with

one of his cousins, while she walked with the other. "I am not going to make the man too proud," reflected Lady Bell, with a quiet consciousness that she had it in her power to make a man hold up his head among his fellows; "he is saucy enough without that."

The winter weather was passably dry, so that the fact of Oxford Street's not being paved did not materially interfere with the ladies' comfort. They saw a man in the act of being whipped round Covent Garden, but he was not in their way. His worship the Mayor's coach passed them, but they were not aware of the circumstance that he had been robbed that very morning, in sight of his retinue, at Turnham Green, by a single highwayman, who swore that he would shoot whoever resisted. Though the knowledge had travelled fast, it would not have inflicted qualms even on the Misses Sundon, for they were not going out of town.

The walking-party were not so fortunate

as to encounter the wild Indians, who loomed so largely in Lady Sundon's imagination as one of the sights of London this year; but they got a glimpse of Omiah, the native of Otaheite brought home by Captain Cook. The drawback was that the interesting savage was not at the moment in South Sea costume, which, perhaps, was not exactly suited to a January day in London—on the contrary, he formed a dingy representative of an Englishman in a frock and pantaloons.

In the rooms where were the last clean-cut coinage, the casts of figures in metal, the ingenious clocks, and the skeleton models of larger machines, which were to turn the world upside down, Lady Bell did her best to be interested and edified. But after all she found her greatest fascination in Captain Fane's intelligent satisfaction, which stimulated and warmed the whole man, so that his incredulity gave way to credulity, and in place of sardonic fault-finding, he grew, as it sounded, quite extravagant

in his praise, and became boyish in his animation.

“These are the marvels of creative mind, Lady Bell. They are signs of battles won over the opposing elements. I’d liefer fight with air and water for my fellow-creatures than fight my fellow-creatures themselves. I’d sooner have been Mr. Boulton, of Birmingham, or the grey stooping Scotchman his partner, Mr. Watt, who has come up to town about a patent, and is standing yonder explaining his pistons and valves to a country mechanic, than I would have been Admiral Rodney or poor Lord Clive.”

“Nay, but Captain Fane, without our Admirals and Generals where would be the victories of peace?” objected Lady Bell, putting up her little chin shrewdly.

“True, for our comfort,” admitted Captain Fane; “and if wishes were horses, beggars would ride. It is one thing to command even his Majesty’s flag-ship, and nail the colours to the mast if need be, and another to control the elements. There were many

captains in Syracuse, but only one Archimedes. That spare stooping man is the Archimedes of the modern world."

"And he hath the air of a tradesman," said one of the Miss Sundons softly, as if resigning herself perforce to the lamentable want of style of the modern Archimedes.

"Or of an old schoolmaster," chimed in Lady Bell mischievously, with a half in-advertent glance of approving contrast at Captain Fane's stalwart, well-carried figure.

It was a "very pretty" manly figure, though it was not that of an effeminate dandy such as Admiral Rodney had shown himself, before his debts drove him to France, and although it had not escaped the professional rolling gait of the sailor.

Doubtless even so strict and wise a judge as Harry Fane was prepared to be, felt propitiated, whether he knew it or not, by the invidious womanish glance which contrasted the person of the great mechanic with that of the obscure naval officer, and awarded the advantage to the latter.

“What would you have?” he said, smiling. “Sure he has the best to his share, and there is an old schoolmaster in Bolt Court, at whom we should not dare to peep, but whom ladies of quality, I am glad to say, have paid with all the coin at their command, for his generosity towards them.”

“Ah! you mean the great and good Dr. Johnson,” exclaimed Lady Bell eagerly. “My Mrs. Sundon and I, we should have been proud to wait on him, on our bended knees, if we had got the opportunity. But I fear his health is failing too much for him to appear often in society. I did hope to have had a glimpse of him, though I should have half died with fear lest he had set me down, as he is a little prone to do poor fine ladies who do not take his fancy. But you would not compare a man of such erudition in letters to a mere mechanic, however ingenious in his own line?”

“I should like to hear what the great honest man of letters would have to say to the imputation of superiority; I should like

to hear what posterity will have to say," exclaimed Captain Fane with lively impatience. "But I confess I have a natural weakness for the science which provides me with a compass, and the mechanics which build me a ship, so that possibly I am not a fair authority on the comparative merits of science and literature."

"Sir, the very fact of your owning to a natural weakness vouches for your impartiality as a witness," Lady Bell declared with her quaint graciousness.

Through what was audacious in the commendation of so young a lady, there vibrated an exquisite under-tone of simplicity and nobleness. It contributed to soften still further the crude stiffness, essential to the naval moralist, not yet thirty, in his bearing towards Lady Bell, against whose heartlessness and artfulness he had forearmed himself, when he first contemplated with unequivocal condemnation the inconsistency of her position as the youngest and loveliest of dowagers.

When Captain Fane proceeded to escort his ladies to the exhibition of Wedgwood ware, he found that there was no further call for him to point out excellencies, extol achievements, and elicit the faint echo of his own enthusiasm. Lady Bell especially was in unaffected delight. Her whole artistic nature was stirred ; she was excited to the highest enjoyment.

Lady Bell flew from fountain to statue, from plateau to vase. She hung over the nymphs, with their garlands, over the groups of flowers—herself the most graceful nymph and blooming flower that met the spectator's eye.

She was on her own ground. The ware of Wedgwood and the designs of Flaxman were, indeed, infinitely beyond her poor little performances in “composition” for seals and patterns for ruffles ; but the spirit of the two was not so wide apart as to prevent Lady Bell's entering heart and soul into the finished work before her, and rejoicing in its culmination.

“If Mr. Watt is a stooping, spectacled man, whose grey hair needs no powder, as powder will not conceal its weather-worn whiteness, what do you say to all these elegant forms and materials owing their origin to a small-pox-seamed working man, wanting a leg?” Captain Fane tried her.

She only laughed. “I should say he was Vulcan himself, only Vulcan was a smith, not a potter. But I was thinking of the shield of Achilles, of which I have read in Mr. Pope’s ‘Homer.’ I should not mind what he was who could shed beauty around him. Look at these sky-blues, sea-greens, shell lilacs, and pearl-whites. Notice that cup on the stalk, Captain Fane; what a globe, what delicately-raised birds! I vow I can count their feathers in flight along the rim. But I am forgetting to thank you, sir,” exclaimed Lady Bell, stopping on a sudden thought, and turning to her conductor with frank gratitude. “You have given me a very happy morning. And not only that, but on many another morning

when I am dabbling feebly enough with my box of colours and my embroidery chenilles, I shall think of this morning, and recall to my profit, sure, as well as to my pleasure, Mr. Boulton's coins and medals, and Mr. Wedgwood and Mr. Bentley's least dish."

"Will you make me happy in return, Lady Bell, by conferring on me an additional favour?" said Henry Fane with an impulsive stammer that was directly opposed to his usual calmness, and yet was by no means unbecoming in the grave young man. "Will you do me the honour to accept this cup from me, and keep it as a trophy of Wedgwood and a memento of what you have been so good as to call a happy morning?" and the fellow who was known for his restiveness and captiousness, spoke the words humbly, as if he were addressing them to a queen.

"With the greatest pleasure, sir," answered Lady Bell, without a shade of reluctance, and with a sigh of pure satisfaction and exultation in the promised possession. "I

have been longing to make a purchase of a small sample of the wonders before me, to take it home and preserve it as one of my cherished treasures. But I feared that my shallow purse, already well emptied with town requisitions and extravagances, could not compass what I desired. I am trespassing on your friendliness; but besides being yourself a lover of art, you are a kinsman of my kind hostess, and I declare, through Sir Peter, you are related to my Mrs. Sundon."

Lady Bell slightly impaired the winning ingenuousness of her acceptance by thus arguing it out, in order to justify it in her own eyes. But she atoned for the falling off by the evident gratification with which she hailed a thread of connection between Captain Fane and Mrs. Sundon.

So agreeably was Lady Bell persuaded of the slender link, that she helped the open-handed sailor, Miss Sundon and Miss Lyddy, to choose a piece of Wedgwood ware for Mrs. Sundon, in addition to the pieces for

Lady Sundon and the girls, and readily undertook to take care of the former piece, convey and present it to Mrs. Sundon, along with the almanack for her friend, and the set of flappers for Caro, which Lady Bell had in store.

Lady Bell made no comment, though she could hardly have overlooked a circumstance which she might attribute, as the Sundons attributed it, to her higher rank. There was the same characteristic difference between Lady Bell's cup and the plates and saucers of the others that there had been between Benjamin's mess and the messes of his brethren, as sent them from the hands of Joseph, when Jacob's sons went in and ate with the ruler of Egypt. Lady Bell's piece of Wedgwood ware was five times more valuable than the other pieces.

CHAPTER X.

A PARTY ON THE WATER.

CAPTAIN FANE, young wiseacre as he was, reckoned foolishly with little knowledge of the world, and less knowledge of woman's nature, that the next time he met Lady Bell he should take up the acquaintance at the very point at which he had left it off, on the lucky hit of his introducing the ladies to the galleries of science and art.

Far from it, every incident, every influence was different. *Dramatis personæ* had entered on the scene who were as new as they were distasteful to Harry Fane; but they were not new to Lady Bell, and they and their fellows were possessed of long established claims on her regard.

True, some weeks had passed, during which Captain Fane had been before his chiefs of the Admiralty, and kept hard at work on his professional business ; but a few weeks were nothing, in Harry Fane's estimation, to warrant this transformation.

When Captain Fane employed his next disengaged morning, in repairing to his cousin's house in Cleveland Court, he found a gay company marshalled there, about to take advantage of an unusually fine February day to have a party on the water.

"Well come, Harry !" cried hearty Lady Sundon ; "we only lacked a naval man to sit in the end of our barge."

"We shall be glad to avail ourselves of your experience, sir," Lady Bell, whose party it was specially, was polite enough to say ; but it was said carelessly, and she did not wait for an answer, as both her ears were monopolized.

The one ear was filled with the whispers of an affected, lisping woman, into whose affectation and lisp there could yet be

infused such a judiciously-mixed spice of wit and scandal as very often rendered her whispers irresistible to their hearers.

Lady Bell's remaining ear was kept fixed by the honeyed sharpness of tongue of a long, lazy, handsome man, in the lingering exquisiteness of costume of a purple-velvet coat and breeches and white silk stockings, double vest—one white, the other jonquil colour—two watch guards, a solitaire, diamond buckles, and a little hat.

Beside this full-fledged, fine-hued gentleman, Captain Fane, in his plain blue and white uniform, looked a very sober, and, in his present humour, a somewhat gruff bird ; but Harry took up his gold-laced hat on the amount of encouragement he received, and went with the company.

He was the more induced to join the party because he was all at once seized with a burning wish and necessity to ascertain the precise terms on which Lady Bell Trevor stood with two of her companions.

Partial and superficial as Captain Fane's

acquaintance with the fashionable world was, the pair were too marked for him not to have a chance of being familiar with their antecedents.

Sir George Waring and Mrs. Lascelles were connected by more than an accidental association, though they had escaped the ignominy of a miserable bond of union. The owners of the names were continually to be seen together at the same gay parties, some of which were of a debatable character.

It was well understood that the couple were fast allies, though the nature of the alliance remained a mystery. Was it friendship among the heartless, as there is honour among thieves? Lady Bell honestly believed so.

Was it true, as some said, that Sir George had bought over Mrs. Lascelles by a large debt won from her at piquet, to back him in all his endless idle schemes and intrigues, and to play into his hand in the fickle, evil aims of the life at once of a Sir Fribble and a Lovelace?

Did the solution lie in an unauthorised, low-toned love between the wickedly good-natured pair, who, with the wisdom of the serpent, held the passion in check, and preserved their cool, careless mask, trusting faintly that death might one day interpose in their behalf, and remove Mrs. Lascelles's husband, or waiting deliberately till the love rooted in ashes and fed on malignant vapours, should be surely and for ever extinguished?

As for Mrs. Lascelles's husband, he played no prominent part in the drama, and put in no claim for sympathy. He was as basely indifferent as the others; he simply tolerated his wife, and accorded her his protection, so long as she did not outrage it.

In reality there was no public scandal concerning these people; but Harry Fane could not endure to see Lady Bell Trevor with them, on intimate terms, and she was still seated between the two in the barge.

Mrs. Lascelles wriggled as a serpent wriggles its glossy spots, and shot forth

unholy green fire, dragon-like, on the right of Lady Bell.

On the left lounged Sir George, as a splendid sleek tiger steps stealthily before it springs, and even when it is too gorged and not greedy enough to spring, bites in wanton playfulness.

Lady Bell was so ignorant of the true nature of such persons, that she stopped short with admiring their orange and sable glories; she was tickled and taken with, rather than repelled, by the green fire of Mrs. Lascelles's brilliant scandal, and the playful biting of Sir George's half-caressing, highly cultivated cynicism,—something altogether different from Harry Fane's wholesome, blustering criticism.

In addition to Lady Bell's ignorance, her perceptions were slightly warped, so that she was disposed to be but too lenient to the hole whence she herself had been dug, and the pit from which she had been drawn.

The barge swept along, among other and less ornamental barges laden with hay,

coals, sheep, and pigs, past wharfs and piers, under bridges, below balconies and projecting stories of buildings, by gables of houses—until it left stone and lime behind, and reached green banks and lawns, though the trees still stretched brown, gnarled, or drooping boughs, sharp and unclothed, against the blue of the sky. There was just the dimly sweet, green budding of a fine February to tell that spring was at hand.

Lady Bell smiled brightly and chatted freely with her chosen companions.

Captain Fane had no resource but to fume secretly, and seek, as he steered, to be contented with the companionship of the Sundons. There was one safeguard in Lady Sundon's irrepressible good fellowship, which was restrained by no extreme delicacy or humility, that it combated successfully her instinctive homage to rank and fashion, and prevented her from being left entirely out of any group in her vicinity.

Sir George and Mrs. Lascelles's blandness,—the great quality on which they

prided themselves, in the absence of all higher qualities,—might not have remained unalloyed with insolence. The gentleman and lady might have rebuffed what they regarded as offensive intrusion in Lady Sundon's freedom of speech, seeing that the pair attached themselves to the Sundons solely on Lady Bell's account. But dear, delightful, naïve little Lady Bell had her weaknesses, which her friends were quick enough to perceive and respect in time. One of these weaknesses was, that she would not submit to see snubbing administered in her presence to the hospitable country baronet's wife and her absurdly gawky step-daughters, with whom she had the misfortune to be domiciled in town.

Neither would the froward goddess consent at present to be rescued, to quit these Sundons and put herself under the guardianship of Mrs. Lascelles, who, if she and Sir George had got their will, would have had Lady Bell, without delay, cut the whole connection, even so far as her dear Mrs. Sundon.

Mrs. Sundon was a true woman of quality, and of the world, indeed, but she had abandoned her sphere, and might live to turn queen's evidence against her old world, any day. She was blue, stuck up, and tiresomely virtuous for a young woman. Lady Bell spoilt herself by quoting and aping this model.

But Sir George and Mrs. Lascelles must set to work cautiously in doing their benevolent "possible" to cure Lady Bell of this and other defects. Rome was not built in one day, and neither in one day would a wilful girl's rampant staunchness and warmheartedness be converted into a conveniently faithless and lukewarm state of the affections.

In the meantime, Lady Sundon had insisted on drawing everybody's attention to Chelsea, because she had once assisted at a "whim" there, when she had gone over Chelsea Hospital.

The building had, at this time, its wounded soldiers who had been disabled at

Bunker's Hill, and some of whom Captain Fane had brought home in his frigate.

There was a little talk of the engagement, in which the general company joined. It was notable that Sir George, who was a carpet knight, treated the resistance as a sorry trifle, and always called the men who had instituted it, "rebels." But Captain Fane, who had seen service, and fought stoutly against the very men, merely named them "provincials," and stated plainly that they were right, when they declared that they had not lost the battle, since, though they were driven out of the entrenchments, they had succeeded in no less an achievement than that of blockading the English army.

Lady Bell inquired with interest after Captain Fane's own adventures, of which he was specially unwilling to speak in such a company. But he told what some of his messmates had done under fire: how they had been lying waiting their turn from the surgeons, when red-hot shot had passed

once and again through the cockpit; notwithstanding, it had spared the *Thunder-bomb's* lads, though it was only for them to be lodged, by his Majesty's and the country's kindness, in the other hospital, Greenwich.

"I suppose the dear timber-toes prefer their beef salt and their tobacco stale for the sake of old associations," suggested Sir George mincingly.

"Then, I'm sure it is no kindness to deny them their sweet tastes," followed up Mrs. Lascelles. "There need not be these rows about the Lords of the Admiralty helping themselves to the funds. The Lords of the Admiralty are always helping themselves to something, worse than the Lords of the Treasury,—but both lords must live. Oh, forgive me, Captain Fane, and don't look so fierce. I dare say it is the shore that demoralises your friends."

"I dare say it is, madam, if they are demoralised, which I, their servant, have no business to take for granted," replied Captain Fane angrily.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCORD.

I KNOW that the shore demoralised my friend Lady Kitty Lake," continued Mrs. Lascelles benignly; "she could not be prevailed on to leave it after she had reached it again. But what do you think her Commadore did to her, my dear Lady Bell? Kept her under closed hatches—whatever these may be—with no more light than half a tallow candle to make her head and do herself up, whenever the ship had taken a prize, and there was an insinuating enemy on board. However, she stole a march on her tyrant. She amused herself in the middle of some shocking sea-fight, by getting herself up in an imitation of her

husband's uniform. You must know she is a big, imposing-looking woman, and he a little ton of a man, as fat as one of the pigs in the coops, copper colour in complexion, bristling all over with hogs' hair, and in the habit of amusing himself with cursing and swearing through a speaking-trumpet. I believe he is known as the 'Cursing Commodore,' though how cursing should be a means of distinguishing him from other commodores, I am at a loss to say. Well, the moment the firing ceased, Lady Kitty, metamorphosed into a creditable officer, ran upon deck, and was in time to get the enemy to deliver up to her his sword, which she returned with a genteel bow. The Commodore was so frightened for the trick's being noised abroad—and he laughed at, if not superseded—that he was forced to connive at it, and so lost the opportunity of behaving with his usual brutality."

"Allow me to tell you, madam," interposed Captain Fane, very sternly for the

occasion, "that Commodore Lake has the reputation of being a most humane, as well as a very gallant officer in his squadron, to which I have the honour to belong."

"I'm quite easy, sir," lisped Mrs. Lascelles, without a second's awkwardness in the concession; "I tell the story as it was told to me. Perhaps you have also the pleasure of knowing my friend Lady Kitty."

"No, madam; and I conjecture that I should not feel myself at all worthy of the acquaintance," growled Harry Fane.

"Oh, I don't know that, sir, urged Mrs. Lascelles blandly. "Lady Kitty makes every allowance; particularly when, poor soul! she is a prisoner in a hideous den of a ship, with none but you amiable tars to make eyes at, in order to pass her time."

"Now, can't you be amiable, Harry," said Lady Sundon, in an audible aside, "as madam gives you credit for being without too much reason? Yes, I assure you, madam," declared Lady Sundon, in a louder key, and directly addressing Mrs. Lascelles,

“if my cousin had been on ship-board with your Lady Kitty, he would have been mighty proud to be made eyes at by so distinguished a lady, and would have done his best to entertain her with his books, and maps, and specimens. He is a fellow of parts, though he don’t do himself justice, or lay himself out to be agreeable.”

“What a pity!” exclaimed Mrs. Lascelles sleepily.

“Ain’t it?” responded Lady Sundon, with animation. “I often tell him so. There! Harry, do you hear that?”

“Captain Fane is obliged to you for telling me and the world what he takes such pains to hide under a bushel,” remarked Mrs. Lascelles; “but Lady Kitty is like myself,—she don’t much affect books and maps.”

“No more do I,” said Lady Sundon cordially; “and I wish Harry would throw them aside, and cultivate company manners.”

“La! you know you don’t practise what you preach,” objected Miss Sundon, who

had been engrossed with admiration of Mrs. Lascelles and Sir George, but who felt that it was time to vindicate the superior delicacy of herself and her sister from any suspicion of complicity with Lady Sundon's breezy vigour. "You are always professing to sister and me, Lady Sundon, when we try to hold you again, to get you to be quiet, and to adopt that repose which is so necessary and becoming to a delicate female—that you despise company manners."

"Because I ain't a delicate female, child, and I am your father's wife, the mistress of you and Lyddy and the whole house, as I can tell all concerned," said Lady Sundon a little indignantly. "If I were a bad mistress of Sir Peter's family you would not venture to speak so to me; therefore, I can well afford to let your foolish tongue wag without minding it," continued Lady Sundon, rapidly cooling down and recovering her habitual good humour. "Besides, can't you see that I am too old to learn company manners, as I am too old to improve my

mind, which I was telling you t'other day, Lady Bell?"

"Don't learn anything that is foreign to you, dear Lady Sundon." Lady Bell forbade any change. "Be always yourself, your best self."

"And I shall crave leave, without any permission granted," spoke up Captain Fane, "to remain myself, even my worst self, rather than take a leaf out of another man's book, say Sir George Waring's."

"Sir, I am honoured by figuring as your example." Sir George nodded slightly, and took snuff.

Lady Bell was vexed by the turn the conversation was taking, and the utter want of harmony in her company. Of what good the clear, curling water, the precocious spring weather, the delightful gliding motion of the boat which the rowers were sending along so smoothly to green Richmond and Hampton—if quarrelling were the order of the day?

Mrs. Lascelles might not dislike it at the

expense of Lady Bell and her host's family, because it would form a tit-bit of conversation to retail, well spiced and served hot, in the next party which Mrs. Lascelles should enter.

Sir George might not mind. This fashionable goddess and god were somewhat above human feeling, and could take their sport out of the discomfiture of others. But these others were troubled, and showed themselves in their worst colours, and unreasonable Lady Bell blamed Captain Fane as the cause. Why was he so stern in contradicting Mrs. Lascelles's incredible story of Lady Kitty Lake? Where was the use of contradicting it at all, when nobody believed it, and when it was not meant to be believed? Why was he so rude to Sir George Waring?

Lady Bell tried to make a diversion in the conversation as the boat was approaching Richmond. She began to remark upon the houses and their occupants.

Then the attention of Sir George and

Mrs. Lascelles became concentrated on a white house in the background, while they expatiated on the merits and misfortunes of its owner.

“It is enough to make a fellow doubt all good,” protested Sir George, with something like melancholy energy, “to think of the fate of poor dear Lady Di, consigned from the tender mercies of a fool only to those of a brute!”

“And she so clever to be twice taken in,” protested Lady Bell, with soft wonder. “She is another Mrs. Damer, Captain Fane.” She turned to Harry in explanation, thinking to propitiate the bear, and seeking to allay a little twinge of conscience where her sweeping censure of that gentleman was concerned.

Had he not been attentive and kind to her on a recent occasion? By whose fault after all had he been suffered to fall into neglect, or to be twitted and tormented that day, until he had assumed an attitude of marked hostility to those around him?

“We are speaking of Lady Di Beauclerk, who can paint like a Breughel or a Sneyders,” finished Lady Bell.

“I dare say, sir”—Mrs. Lascelles came between the couple with her affectation of artlessness—“you prefer a simpler, shorter road to excellence. You think Lady Di would have been better employed if she had been tossing pancakes, or hemming dish-clouts.”

“I don’t know about simpler, shorter roads,” cried Captain Fane defiantly, “but I confess I prefer straight lines, and I have no pity to waste on crooked ones. I do think that your paragon, Lady Di, would have been a vast deal better employed in bearing—ay, even in seeking to better the enormities of one sinner, than in making a trial, for a change, by the aid of the law of divorce, how she should like the enormities of another. And when she finds that she cannot abide the second any more than the first, she raises a precious pother, forsooth! because she is properly punished.”

Lady Bell was aggrieved, even shocked, by this plain speaking. Lady Di had been so heavily punished for her errors, that she had arrived at their being condoned, and had come to be treated herself as a sort of cherished pet, not by her own set alone, but by wiser men and women.

Who or what was this sailor, that he should roughly rend social veils, tear asunder well-bred illusions, and sit in judgment on his fellow-creatures, whose fearful stumbling-blocks and torturing temptations he could never fathom?

Lady Bell would have nothing more to say to Captain Fane. She bestowed her entire regard on Sir George and Mrs. Lascelles. When the party landed and walked up to Hampton Court, Lady Bell went with her particular allies without looking over her shoulder. She suffered them to lead her through the rooms which ambition, in its ostentation and prodigality, had built, and she lingered especially in the "Beauty-room." She made as if she were

absorbed by the meretricious, un-English seeming beauties, and the unedifying traditions which they had left behind them in the gossip of Gramont, quoted aptly and with adroit reticence by Sir George.

She paid no heed on this occasion to the Dutch garden, the long alleys, the goodly boughs, the bridge across the river, with the pure blue sky over all—she treated these as if they might be left out of the count, and as if they did not deserve her notice.

But Sir George took her into the “Maze,” and it was on Sir George that she called, when she was weary of bewilderment, to unravel the labyrinth, and find her a mode of exit.

Sir George finally conducted Lady Bell to the village inn, where the party were to dine, and seated her at the head of the table, in the rustic tea-room, as the queen of the feast.

Lady Bell allowed the particularity of this homage. She received it all—either as

if she were indifferent to what it ought to tend, or as if she had never heard that Sir George was a notorious breaker of women's hearts, a hardened Lothario, whose wings no woman had been able to clip, though he had been fluttering round women from his whelpdom to his somewhat jaded prime of puppydom.

In that prime Sir George was still slightly Harry Fane's junior, while Sir George was far nearer an Adonis by nature, with every personal point immeasurably better brought out by art. But though Sir George had not faced a bronzing climate or a battering service, the high-pressure atmosphere of fashionable dissipation in which he had flourished, was more telling than either alternative. In spite of his baptismal register, Sir George in all his elegance looked not half so fresh and hardly so young as Captain Fane. Manliness took some indemnification, but such indemnification has not always been valued. There have been women to whom such a world-worn hero as

Sir George is irresistibly attractive. There are women to this day, if their qualified annalists do not lie, who prize such a reputation as Sir George Waring's.

This was not the reputation of an honest fellow, a true friend, a brave worker, a gallant gentleman, a reverent and sincere Christian, even in sorry days, for the most part, where Christianity was concerned. But it was the reputation of a man gnawed to the core by the rust of selfishness and self-conceit, who could sneer with the finished grace of a cold-hearted man of the world, pluming himself on having ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—on the evil side alone, having summarily rejected the good as unworthy of his consideration.

Did Lady Bell belong to the order of women who admire such men? It looked as if this man were to her taste; and to give the devil his due, your fine gentleman, when he had everything his own way, could be pleasant—few pleasanter among

the best of good people. The very absence of feeling, and presence of heartless good nature, invested Sir George with a kind of airy agreeability and versatility.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LITTLE DINNER AT HAMPTON, WITH MUSIC ON THE WATER.

IN the course of the little dinner in the Hampton tea-room, Sir George would not only not sit down till the rest of the party were seated, but he would supersede a regular waiter to wait upon his companions. It might have been for the peculiar satisfaction of waiting on Lady Bell, but certainly he did not confine his cares to that quarter of the table. He, the finest gentleman in the room, but that was saying little, did the whole waiting. He changed plates and placed glasses, and brought round sauces, so neatly and so comically, with such cleverness, taste, and

devotion, making amends to everybody, as it were, for all his previous shortcomings—not caring, though his own meal were cold, or though he had not a meal at all—that it was hard, before so patent a proof, not to think him unselfish as well as delightful.

“Upon my word,” mumbled Lady Sundon, with her mouth full of cutlet, “Sir George is the charmingest man going—he beats the women out and out, even you, Lady Bell. I don’t wonder that nobody can say nay to him.”

Mrs. Lascelles did not appear so bent on redeeming her character; she still made wry faces and turned up her nose at the pickled walnuts and the cherry pie.

But Lady Bell was in her element. “I wonder if there are any cows here,” she cried, peeping out of the window behind her. “If there had been such a Whitefoot as we have at Summerhill, I might have run out and milked her and whipped you a syllabub in no time. Yes, I can whip syllabubs, Mrs. Lascelles, you need not look

incredulous, and strain gooseberry fool too, only this is not the season of the year for gooseberries."

"Ain't it?" inquired Mrs. Lascelles with languid innocence.

"Gracious, madam! did you not know that we hadn't gooseberries in February?" questioned Lady Sundon, staring goggle-eyed at this curious piece of ignorance.

Lady Bell went on without paying any heed to Mrs. Lascelles' affectation. "If my Mrs. Sundon or Master Charles were here they would bear out my story."

"By bribery and corruption, only too excusable in such a court," argued Sir George. "But who may Master Charles be when he is at home? An overgrown baby, as his name would imply, or a wild man of the woods, eh, Lady Bell?" asked Sir George with privileged freedom, while preparing to make his own dinner, like the most frugal of hermits, on bread and milk. "No, don't press any grosser fare upon me," he waved off the eagerness of his friends

to repay his benefits. "I do enjoy an Arcadian meal at times, when I have not only the felicity of being in Arcady, but of being with nymphs in Arcady," Sir George bowed, with his hand on his heart.

"It is fine to have the command of such language," said Lady Sundon, holding up her hands.

"But about this Master Charles," Sir George returned to the subject; "can he, after partaking of such syllabubs and gooseberry fools, be still a ruddy youth, with great hands and feet?"

Lady Bell laughed, blushed, and winced a little for her friend. Beside Sir George Master Charles would appear ruddy, and his Lumley-bought gloves and boots did not tend to diminish the natural size of his hands and feet; but where was the harm—in the ruddiness especially, unless she had learnt to despise rude health, like the Misses Sundon? They had been putting severe restraint on themselves, that they might not taste more than a morsel, after being

hours on the water, not so much to bear Sir George company, for they had not foreseen his temperance, as to display their own ethereal appetites.

Harry Fane had watched Lady Bell narrowly. "She is not only of the world worldly, she is as heartless as the others," was his scornful conclusion. "She is ashamed of the mere recollection of some poor befooled country fellow, whatever he may be, better than this mocking jackanapes; but what does it matter to me?"

"A penny for your thoughts, Harry," cried Lady Sundon, "or if you won't give us them, propose a toast, do something for the good of the company."

"I drink to you, then, cousin, since you have started the idea," replied Captain Fane, so soberly that it was almost gloomily, after he found that he could not escape, and that the attention of the party was directed to him.

"A plague on the lad! to give an old married woman who might be his mother,"

remonstrated Lady Sundon, "but if you are all so kind, thanks to you," and Lady Sundon beamed radiantly on the raised glasses.

"Now, Lady Bell, I'm ready for Master Charles," suggested Sir George, holding up his glass of milk.

"Nothing of the kind," said Lady Bell, getting nettled. "At least Master Charles is not a milksop ; supposing you will pledge in no better, you must pledge yourself, Sir George. I give 'Sir George Waring,' and I couple my toast with a sentiment : 'May we persevere in and profit by simplicity.' "

"I respond to your toast with the humblest gratitude, and I drink your sentiment with all the pleasure in life, for have I not profited by simplicity already this day ?" rejoined Sir George, with perfect good-humour, looking not a whit annoyed, but rather gratified, by Lady Bell's poor little wit being spent upon him—a cheerful non-chalance which put Lady Bell to shame.

Affronted with herself, Lady Bell began

hastily to talk of the cockle-shells which had been found by the bushel under one of the floors of Somerset House; and that led to a discussion of the exchange which the Queen had made in giving up Somerset House for Buckingham House.

The discussion paved the way for Mrs. Lascelles descanting on the petition of the maids of honour that they might get a compensation in lieu of supper, which was worth seventy pounds more salary.

When the party went back to the boat, the day was terminating in the rosiest sunset which ever breathed of spring, youth, and promise.

“I vow we must be in Arcady,” repeated Sir George. With all his pretence at fine language, he had just the tiniest spark of the soul of a lover of nature. Yet the glow which blushed on the water and shone on all the faces, and was only the brighter and the gladder for the chill bleakness of winter scarcely forsaken, awoke some small response even in his artificial nature.

As for Captain Fane, he sat with his cap in his hand, letting the breeze blow in his hair, looking down the river towards the open sea, wishing he were away in his ship. Life was bad enough on ship-board sometimes, in the depths of tyranny, ignorance, profanity, and mutiny ; but there the mass of men, even at their worst, were toilsome men in rough earnest. There, in the night-watches, a man could be alone with sea and sky, until he forgot the very existence of heartless fine ladies and expert actors of fine gentlemen.

“We want only music to make the hour complete,” said Sir George. “Lady Bell, might I beg — ?”

Lady Bell hesitated, then yielding to the spirit of the hour, commenced to sing an air from the popular opera.

Sir George struck in with a mellow second, singing being one of this fine gentleman’s accomplishments, as well as playing on the flute and the flageolet.

The song was warmly applauded by all

save Captain Fane. Even Lady Sundon praised, while she frankly admitted that she did not comprehend a word of the jargon, "but nevertheless do let us have some more of it."

"We shall have these boats following us, Lady Sundon," objected Harry Fane, looking round sharply from where he was steering, and indicating, among the work-a-day barges, two boats filled with company, that had been attracted like themselves to a row on the river by a day borrowed from April and set in the end of February. These boats had already been drawn into the wake of the first by the singing.

"What though the boats do follow, they ain't going to run us down," stout Lady Sundon made light of the demur; "you are becoming quite a kill-joy, Harry Fane."

It was an extraordinary sensation for Lady Bell to have the propriety of her behaviour doubted by a man—a sailor—before these pinks of fashion, Sir George and Mrs.

Lascelles, who had been contributing to put Lady Bell at her ease.

She disliked the ruggedness of Captain Fane as much as she liked the suavity of Sir George, which no sauciness of hers could disturb, for she had been saucy in substituting Sir George's own name as a toast which he might drink in milk.

Lady Bell looked Harry Fane in the face and challenged Sir George to accompany her in something which Lady Sundon would approve—"Begone, dull care," or "Pray Goody, cease," a challenge which Sir George accepted, nothing loth.

But before the first song was concluded, one of the boats in the rear shot across the bow of the Sundons' boat, and three or four excited men, in white vests and rich coats like Sir George's, threatened to upset both of the craft as they gesticulated violently, while they shouted—

"Heyday! Waring, hold on! What little opera-girl have you got there? Here, pitch her over to us, that she may tip us

a stave. We've been dining at Kew, and we'll engage to troll, among us, as good an accompaniment as you can contrive with your single pipe, sweet though it be."

"Hold off! Annesley, Gower; mind what you're about. You're absurdly wrong, I tell you, and if you don't set yourselves right, by heavens! I'll have to take the correcting of you into my own hands," called back Sir George, frowning blackly for once in his life.

"It is true, confound him!" cried one of the strange gentlemen, letting his boat fall off. "He's in other company; yonder is Mrs. Lascelles—who would have thought it?—and there is an avenging fury of a naval officer porting helm. Good afternoon, Sir George, good afternoon to you," dropped more faintly over the water.

But Lady Bell had shrunk into herself abashed, recalled to her senses, and deeply wounded alike in her self-respect and her pride.

Not all the solicitations and excuses of

Sir George and Mrs. Lascelles could make Lady Bell immediately forget the indignity to which she had exposed herself, or forgive them for promoting the exposure, though she was silent on her feelings, and as willing as the others to welcome a diversion.

The day was so complete in its spring character, that at sundown a little cloud of midges seemed to start into life and hover in the air.

“How short their day is!” said Lady Bell regretfully for the ephemera. “I know they are only creatures of a day, but to come and go so soon,—if they had waited for a few more months, they might have danced through a few more hours, and not been pinched by so sharp a death. Who knows?”

“My dear creature,—forgive me; my best Lady Bell,” Sir George corrected himself, “the midges have been highly honoured, even before you condescended to pity them. They have more than served their purpose,—they have helped to furnish

an illusion for us, that this February day by the calendar, is in the merry month of May by our experience, and that Hampton is Arcady. Now, here we are past Chelsea, fast coming back to the coarse dissipation of the garish town and the cold winds of March ; what should remain to the midges, but to be swept aside with the illusion ? ”

Lady Bell turned away her head and shut her eyes for a moment, she did not wish to see even the midges swept aside. She did not like the philosophy of which she and hers formed always the centre. She had not consented to view life as a rainbow-hued but hollow mockery, a mere series of convenient, spangled illusions.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT TO LEICESTER FIELDS.

CAPTAIN FANE, of his own free will, would not have paid another visit to Cleveland Court, before he returned to his ship. So far as it rested with him, he had made up his mind—a great deal too tartly for perfect indifference—to have nothing more to do with fine ladies, and to turn his back on fine ladies' entertainers, so long as they were cumbered with such troublesome guests.

But Captain Fane had business with Sir Peter, who was, indeed, about to appoint Harry Fane one of the guardians to his young son, and so punctilious and conscientious a young man as Harry Fane

could not see it his duty to renounce this trust because circumstances had rendered it distasteful to him.

Thus it happened, that while Captain Fane felt scandalised by the manner in which Lady Bell Trevor had suffered herself to float doubly with the tide, in the water-party, while he kept telling himself caustically that he need not have expected anything else, and continued setting his face, more like a flint than ever, against fashionable frivolity and levity—he yet found himself on the steps of Sir Peter Sundon's house.

And at that moment Lady Bell, attended by her maid, tripped out in her calèche and with her hands clasped in her muff, clearly starting on an expedition.

Lady Bell distanced and dumbfounded Captain Fane, who was unfamiliar with the changes of mind and revolutions in tactics of even the staidest and most demure of womankind.

She stopped him as he was about to pass

her with a formally low bow, by holding out a friendly little hand, and bestowing on him the unsolicited information, that she was bound for the great painter in Leicester Fields, who had made so fine a picture of Commodore Keppel.

She was not a sitter herself, but she had made interest to see the paintings which Sir Joshua Reynolds had on hand.

She knew that she should never be able to look upon her daubs after this morning, but, womanlike, she must go and meet her fate, though it were her demolition.

Sir Joshua's pictures were works of genius in his line, equal to Mr. Boulton's and Mr. Wedgwood's exhibitions; therefore, she ventured to offer Captain Fane the benefit of her ticket, as a poor return for his former kindness.

She was all alone, save her maid, Rogers, because Lady Sundon was engaged with Sir Peter, and the Misses Sundon could not stand the smell of paint without the risk of incurring megrim or vertigo. She

was more fortunate—but then she had always dabbled in paints, and so was used to the odour.

Before Captain Fane knew what he was about, he had turned, and was walking away by her side in acceptance of her invitation. Neither did he detest or despise himself for his weakness, as might have been expected.

Lady Bell had succeeded, without a word of confession or acknowledgment, by the shy, wistful appeal of her eyes as she prattled to him, in making him comprehend that she had seen that he was right and she was wrong in their respective opinions of much that had happened at the water-party. She implied that she was sorry for having offended and alienated him; that she had resolved on following, in future, rational pursuits, instead of mere idle pleasure-hunting,—witness her early homage to art this morning.

Captain Fane could not even accuse himself of meddling in a matter which was none

of his, far less could he accuse himself of madly foolish motives.

Was it not in some measure the business of every honourable, kindly man to encourage a girl like Lady Bell, in any intelligent interest that might help to educate her, and raise her above the giddy vacant crowd of fashionables, with whom idleness was the fruitful parent of mischief?

Ought he not to alter his arrangements, and put himself a little out of his way for one morning, to see that she did not fall into company like that of the hateful Sir George Waring, when she was walking abroad with no better protection than her maid's?

True, it was broad day, and with that it was also betimes in the forenoon, doubtless an age before Sir George was up holding his levee, in his brocade nightgown, as he sipped his chocolate, and pencilled his daily note to Mrs. Lascelles.

But people could not be too careful, under some conditions. Lady Sundon was cer-

tainly as fearless and heedless, as Lady Bell was guileless and thoughtless. It became Captain Fane's part to supplement the absence of some of the proper qualities of a guardian in his cousin.

If Lady Sundon was lax, the strictness and zeal of Captain Fane on Lady Bell's behalf might, if the persons principally concerned had given themselves time to think about it, have astonished even them. But this young couple, after the questionable fashion of young couples, did not pause to weigh their relations—they took them for granted.

Lady Bell had even so pleasing a trust in the sedately fault-finding young sea-captain, that she had not the slightest qualm when he at once did her bidding and consented to be elected her escort, such as she would have had with almost any other of the gay dangles about her, and notably with the agreeable Sir George. "Captain Fane is such a manly, true young spark," she took it upon her to decide, for her private satis-

faction, though how she had arrived at the strong conclusion after one or two bantering, bickering interviews, unless from information derived from Lady Sundon, to whose judgment Lady Bell was not wont to pin her faith, it puzzles one to guess. "He is a little prejudiced and hard," continued Lady Bell, mentally taking stock of her companion, "but I can melt him" (there was the triumph!). "I think I know how he would look boarding a ship, and how I could make him drop his sword," which was a purely imaginative vision.

As Lady Bell and Captain Fane passed along the streets, they became eye-witnesses to a curious political contradiction. At one thoroughfare, men were stationed with hand-bills, to be distributed to respectable and influential persons, especially to members of parliament, praying them to stop the shedding of their American brethren's blood. At another thoroughfare, the pedestrians had to thread their way through a crowd—the centre of which was the common hang-

man in the act of burning, to the accompaniment of tumultuous applause, copies of a pamphlet entitled "The Present Crisis with respect to America," which had been condemned by both Houses, as a flagrant insult to the King.

Captain Fane informed Lady Bell that this difference of opinion had even penetrated to the services. He brought forward the instance of Lord Viscount Pitt, son to my Lord Chatham, having asked leave to resign his commission, since he was determined not to serve in a war between the mother country and her colony.

"And what do you say, sir?" inquired Lady Bell.

"I say that it is too late to stop a fratricidal war, save by fighting it out as quickly as may be, and that even if it were not so, it is for me to obey, not to issue, orders," he replied with decision.

At Leicester Fields Lady Bell's ticket procured the admission of the lady and her friend, first into the parlour, where an un-

tidy, abrupt, cordial elderly woman, was herself painting a miniature and hurriedly sopping up her spilt paint, when she heard the steps of visitors.

This was Mrs. Frances Reynolds, who painted "The grimly ghost of Johnson," and wrote the "Essay on Taste"—printed but never published. She was soon on familiar terms with the intruders.

"My brother will be certain to spare time for you," Miss Reynolds assured Lady Bell, "he is like the rest of the geniuses, not above the flattery of such a visit. Bah! haven't I known them all, Burke, Goldy, Dr. Johnson, who has wished my tea-pot might never run dry, and yet hurried off to help himself with his own spoon out of a Countess's sugar-bason, and been put down—to put her down in turn in the presence of her grand company? Ah! well, I have never wished the great Doctor would stay by his own fire-side, though he has forced Joshua to rise and take his hat, if he would not sit on into the small hours, and

have us all winking with sleep as the only hint to our visitor to be gone. I don't know that we think ourselves so enviable. You'll be sent for to the painting-room presently, Lady Bell—no, you need not look at my baby faces—child's play to the doings of my brother,—the man in Cavendish Square can never come near them, though I should not say it. But first you must let me have a look at you, for even we poor artists hear of the belles of the season, with other public matters, in the conversation of sitters, and when we are bidden to look in at a *conversazione*, or a rout, now and then."

"Oh, pray, Miss Reynolds, don't make me public property," cried Lady Bell, in laughing objection.

"If my brother seek to paint you, as he has painted so many of your sisterhood, you will become public property, whether you like it or no," boasted the sister, "you cannot help it, madam, it is a tax you owe to the country, like the tax on powder or

armorial bearings. But who is this gentleman? I did not catch his name. Oh! my brother has done many naval men, and for my part, I like his Lord Mount Edgcumbe and Commodore Keppel, as well as any face which he has put through his hands. My Lord Mount Edgcumbe is a Devonshire man, and for Commodore Keppel he gave Joshua his first lift, and we may well love a dog with the name of 'Keppel,' as Dr. Johnson could love a dog if it were called 'Hervey.' "

The garrulous inquisitive lady was interrupted by her little niece, as quiet as the aunt was a rattle, and as shy and attentive to the proprieties as Miss Reynolds was impetuous and eccentric. This young girl was Sir Joshua's Offy Palmer, whom he was to immortalise, reading "Clarissa," and who was to be Mrs. Gwatkin, while her sister was to be the heiress of the largest fortune acquired by the prosecution of art in this inartistic England, and to marry the Marquis of Thomond. She brought a message

that her uncle was free from a sitter then, and for the next half hour, and that he was coming himself to take Lady Bell Trevor and Captain Fane to his painting-room, where he would shew them the pictures in his possession.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR JOSHUA AT HOME.

IN another instant there entered a fresh, almost chubby-faced gentleman, with a dint in his nether lip, and an ear-trumpet in his hand. He was not without a certain dapperiness in the unexceptionable brown coat and spotless ruffles, which he had substituted for his painting-coat and plain cuffs.

He was the briskest of gentlemen, the most obliging of geniuses who ever kept sitters in good humour and under control, by the very ease of his dignity in bearing with their airs and oddities.

The contemporary of the glorious, careless good-fellow Gainsborough, of Romney in his

arrogant, one-sided power, and later of Opie, the most self-taught and the most self-asserting painter among them—Sir Joshua beat them all.

It may be true that his art was pervaded with an artificial, aristocratic flavour, and that he made a little lady of his strawberry girl, and modern English my lords of every historical personage who passed under his pencil.

Painters may feel it their duty, from their watch-tower of technical knowledge, to impress on the world their grieved conviction, that the president of the old Academy, so widely cultivated, so full of sense and acumen, in addition to his professional ability, and to the industry which “never passed a day and lost a line,” the chosen friend of the most public-spirited men of his time—yet painted deliberately for a single generation.

He was, according to his brethren, wilful and regardless of the destructive nature of the pigment which he used, so that they

produced a certain effect to last his time. His accusers point in proof of their charge to the fading lines and cracking canvas of the very works of which all Englishmen are proud.

So be it, if it must be so; we have still the poetry (let some hold it fantastic) of the Tragic Muse, the gallant heroism of Keppel, the thoughtful benevolence of Johnson, the broad archness of Nelly O'Brien; and we have following on the dainty playfulness of "Pick-a-back" a long train of fresh and delicate, lovely and stately, English maids and matrons, with Sir Joshua's quaint sweet children bringing up the rear.

In Lady Bell's day there was no thought, unless it were among the chemically skilled, that these softly glowing, wonderfully blended colours would wane, or the fine surface give way. Sir Joshua was regarded as the quintessence of inspired and courtly painters, treading in the footsteps of Van-dyck.

Sir Joshua had only a few of his paintings

to show the eager, intelligent young lady, whose grace was so winning to his eye, and her eloquence so grateful to his ear—through his trumpet—as it reached him. There were fair ladies sacrificing to the graces and to the muses, very interesting to Lady Bell. There was Dr. Beattie in his gown as an Oxford Doctor of Laws, with his book on “The Immutability of Truth” under his arm, and the Angel of Truth going before him, beating down the gruesome figures of Sophistry, Scepticism, and Infidelity, said to personify Voltaire, Gibbon, and Hume, which was carefully studied by Captain Fane. There was the doom of Count Ugolino and his sons, which enchained with the fascination of horror both of the gazers. There was the portrait of a plump little woman, sprightly even on canvas, her high-dressed hair wreathed with pearls, a shawl girdle binding loosely the short waist and bodice, which Sir Joshua strove to paint into fashion—a great improvement on the earlier

elongated steel-bound waist and laced-up bodice.

As Sir Joshua was about to name the original, the real lady ran unushered, in her hat and cloak, into the room.

The new-comer had not a moment to stay to be introduced to Lady Bell Trevor and Capain Fane. She was in haste to tell Sir Joshua that she had just come down from the Burgh, where she had left her master at his place of business, but nearly as ailing as the Doctor (good lack, what a load she had on her head and shoulders !) She wished to know whether Sir Joshua had done the re-touching which he had taken it into his head to throw away on a barn-door face beyond improvement. Give her joy on the audacity of complimenting herself; but she did not mean to compliment—not that she was not well enough pleased with her own, she would never deny it. She would like the picture packed and sent out without loss of time. Queeney and the rest of the young fry might care to look at it one day, when it

was all that was left of their mother. Good day to him and to all.

“You are in luck, Lady Bell,” announced Sir Joshua, returning, briskly rubbing his hands, from seeing the lady to her coach, “if you have not had a previous opportunity of meeting my friend. That is Mrs. Thrale, the wife of the great brewer, who is himself an exceedingly liberal gentleman and well-read scholar; but his wife excels him in the classics.”

“She was one of the west country Lynches,” said Lady Bell, showing her acquaintance with the lady’s antecedents.

“It is she who has made a home for the great Doctor at that pattern of country houses, Streatham,” continued Sir Joshua. “She has preserved an invaluable life, madam, years longer to the country, by taking Dr. Johnson’s health under her care, as she has often told us, and by nursing him out of some of his worst attacks and most injurious habits. Would to God her efforts could continue successful, both with him and

Mr. Thrale, who is, I fear, in a bad way, and on the brink of an apoplexy."

"She deserves all honour," said Lady Bell warmly.

"The more so that her cares seem to sit lightly on her." Captain Fane could not resist the sly hit.

Lady Bell flashed a little reproach upon him from her eyes, which looked as if she were condescending to take his manners, as Mrs. Thrale had taken Dr. Johnson's health, under her special superintendence.

"A matter of temperament," pronounced the genially philosophic painter.

Sir Joshua, who enjoyed his own reputation as an urbane and accomplished man of the world, as he enjoyed most things in the pleasantly prosperous places in which his lines were cast, began to talk to Captain Fane of Captain Cook, with whom the painter's friend, Dr. Burney's son, had made a voyage round the world; and of Sir Joseph Banks's collection of objects of natural history, which Captain Fane had

seen under the care of young Mr. Jenner, the favourite pupil of Dr. Hunter.

Sir Joshua had made a happy choice of subjects to which Captain Fane was alive, and in which he was well informed. The gentlemen talked like kindred spirits, while Lady Bell, to her credit, was content to remain in the background, and listen with deference and delight. She was innocently proud of her companion.

How very different was the figure which Captain Fane cut to-day, in company with a genius who was at the same time a finished gentleman of any school, from the figure which Captain Fane had presented at the sailing-party !

What other male friend of Lady Bell's could have stood so severe a test, and come out of it so splendidly ? Not Sir George Waring, in spite of his elegance and his musical talents, any more than Master Charles. Lady Bell was deeply impressed by Captain Fane's gifts, which he was really in the habit of hiding under a bushel. She

was almost provoked when Sir Joshua remembered his duty to her, not guessing how well pleased she was that he should forget it, and began to tell her of the one lady who belonged to the Royal Society of Artists, Mrs. Angelica Kauffman.

It was not a difficult process to make a digression to those ladies who were amateur artists, and to render Lady Bell, in spite of her *savoir faire*, bashfully grateful, by deigning to drop a hint for her benefit on the mixing and laying-on of colours, and on the drawing of such slight designs as Sir Joshua had himself afforded to Poggi for his fans.

“I thought t’other morning we spent together was very happy,” Lady Bell spoke out of the fulness of her heart to her squire when they were in the square, and he was looking out for a chair that she might get home in time to keep an appointment with her mantua-maker; “but I shall be always recalling this day and its lessons when I am busiest and happiest at Summerhill.”

“Don’t you think I shall recall it, Lady Bell,” asked Harry Fane, “when for a studio in which to busy myself, I shall be reduced to ‘between decks,’ and for my fine arts shall be setting men to rig spars and haul in sails, varied by pointing a gun instead of a telescope, and submitting to be carried down into the cockpit?”

“Oh, no ; you won’t be carried there !” cried Lady Bell, with impetuous haste.

“At least I did not mean to crave pity from you,” protested Harry with unconscious tenderness shaking his firm voice. “A grumpy, hulking fellow who has been so much at sea that he has lost the man-œuvre of giving a wide berth to what displeases his crotchets on shore, is of no good save to shout orders in a storm, or to keep a look-out against the national enemy.”

Lady Bell did not contradict him, but she looked in his face, somewhat set and lined for a man of his age, but an honest and manly face, which had looked its

kindest on her, the hardness in which she could melt, as she had said, like the melting of a block of ice before a meridian sun.

She gave him a parting look as the chairmen lifted her chair, which raised a mighty commotion, for which Lady Bell was decidedly answerable, in the blue-coated breast of the young man—thought so long-headed and calm-hearted, so rational, discreet, and obdurate, that he could be let cast stones at all the follies and extravagancies of his time. Lady Bell's look said, "You are good for all that is cleverest, truest, bravest—not to the world, perhaps, for you know, none better, that the world is a giddy, vicious, Vanity Fair—but to me. You need not tell others that I say so, but I say it; and you need not forget that I said it, in the long days during which I am mixing with people whom you justly despise, or have taken refuge at Summerhill; and when you are sailing on the high seas, doing your duty like a man, guarding our shores, and fighting our foes."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MASQUED BALL IN PROSPECT.

CAPTAIN FANE, though he *was* rational, and had a regard for consequences, was fallible, and did not cease to frequent his cousin's house in Cleveland Court, because of that very inconsiderate look of Lady Bell's.

On the contrary, he who was no dangler in drawing-rooms, and was wont to improve his time in town by going afresh over the libraries and museums, and by attending every gathering and discussion of scientific men, began to haunt Lady Sundon's rooms, until even that hospitably-disposed kinswoman could not refrain from an uneasy private comment, "Something's going to

happen to Harry Fane ; he is turning up for ever, like a new farthing. He used to make himself as scarce and hard to find as a gold guinea, but now he has become dirt-cheap, and is always lying about in everybody's way. Lady Bell, Lady Bell, I hope you understand that I only bade you sort my cousin in jest. I hope that you have not to answer for a brave sailor's undoing. He has enough of knocking about in the open sea, without being run down in the harbour ; and I consider Harry like a son of my own, since his own folk are all dead and gone."

Lady Bell bore the unspoken charge as if she were perfectly innocent, save that even a more brilliant bloom than she had shown lately, glowed in her cheeks and was reflected in her eyes.

Lady Bell was full of a gaiety of the season in which she was about to take a part, and which was novel to her. "I dare say I shall soon have had enough of the gay world—my fling, as you call it, Lady Sundon

—but I have not yet been to a masquerade,” explained Lady Bell; “I confess that I am dying with curiosity to see what it is like. Only fancy one’s ordinary neighbours and friends as sultanas and chimney-sweeps, Queen Elizabeths and Richard the Thirds. Oh! I think it must be charmingly romantic and diverting—that fun of finding people out, and of baffling their curiosity, while you may be as witty as you please and can.”

“All very fine, my dear; but Cornely’s masquerades were not exactly the place for seeing proper company” — Lady Sundon played the monitor for once — “and at the old Pantheon masquerades, Covent-Garden women and highwaymen used to mix with the regular guests. How could it be otherwise, when nobody could tell who was who?”

“Yet you all went to these places, my dear Lady Sundon,” Lady Bell coaxed her friend, “and riots have gone out of fashion. Besides, this masquerade is to be given

by the gentlemen of White's. They are to have lady patronesses. At an hour fixed upon, each lady and gentleman is to unmask, so that one could not be safer in a private house. Indeed I am very glad that the gentlemen of White's are to be prodigiously gallant, and give a masquerade ball this year, when I happen to be in town. Tickets must be procured for you and Nancy and Lyddy, Lady Sundon; of course they must. I'll never rest till the deficiency is supplied; I'll not stir a foot, or order a costume, without you."

Lady Bell referred to the circumstance that in consequence of the run on masquerade tickets, and the ultra exclusiveness of the set issuing them, only one ticket to Lady Bell Trevor had found its way to Cleveland Court. "So Nancy and Lyddy are down in the mouth," Lady Sundon said; "and for myself, I own I'm an old fool; but if the affair is to be above board, I'd give my two ears yet to see the play."

There was less difficulty for gentlemen in

getting admittance, and when Lady Bell, the moment the club masquerade was announced, raised her eager voice in its favour, Captain Fane had only to speak to a brother officer, who was a member of the club, in order to have a ticket. Harry Fane made a specious excuse to Lady Sundon for his haste to countenance this vanity.

“It is not that I approve of such an entertainment; I have heard from yourself that it is one of the most lax and perilous in an age of *ridottos* and public gardens—the more reason why as many sober and virtuous people as can make an entrance, should use their right to confront the foolish and vicious, and protect the innocent and unwary.”

“Harry, don’t draw scores before my nose,” objected Lady Sundon emphatically, and when the gentleman moved away discomfited, she concluded her remark for her own benefit, “as if you would have been in such a case to act as a bodyguard even to me and Nancy and Lyddy! The grand

passion has much to answer for, in playing such pranks with a staid, sensible fellow, who has very little patrimony besides his pay, and ought to know he is not a fit match for my Lady Bell. I meant that his comb should be cut, for he carried it over high; but I'm frightened that it is done only too closely. And he's my own flesh and blood, though Lady Bell is a charming young woman, and I could eat her, I have taken to her so hugely. Besides, it is a credit and pleasure to show her about in town, which is in the habit of thinking naught of the wares of a country body like me."

Lady Bell's influence would have gained the tickets which were wanting, but, in the interval before the ball, there came the threat of a family calamity that effectually prevented the Sundons' attendance, and very nearly put a stop to Lady Bell's making acquaintance with the delights of a masquerade.

Word arrived that Lady Sundon's only child, the son and heir of the family, had

met with a dangerous accident, by a fall from a tree, in one of the meadows near his grammar school, a week before. He had not recovered his senses when the letter was written, though the chances were, from the number of days which had elapsed, that the hurt must have yielded, so far, to medical skill. A fatal termination would have caused the despatch of a special messenger, who would have reached London and preceded the announcement of the accident in the slow course of post.

But great was the flurry and distress. Poor Lady Sundon prepared to set out instantly for the scene of the accident, to nurse her son, should she find him alive to be nursed by her.

The Misses Sundon, who had been wont to utter, as loudly as the plaintiveness of their reproaches would permit, charges of undue preference on the part of Sir Peter for his boy over his girls, and of gross indulgence and spoiling on the part of the boy's mother, were sufficiently kindly

women, in spite of their follies, to be cut up by their half-brother's danger, and to forget altogether, in their roused and alarmed affection, that they had insisted on electing themselves the young master's rivals.

Lyddy Sundon, who was the more energetic of the sisters, would not hear of any other arrangement than that she should accompany Lady Sundon in her journey, and remain with her, to assist in nursing the little lad.

Lady Sundon, whose rosy, elderly face was purple with subdued excitement, while she could not keep the moisture out of her eyes by the repeated furtive movement of her hand across her face, did not fail to be touched by the token of respect and regard. "I'm sure it's very good of you, Lyddy," the mother said, with all her heart. "I ain't likely to forget it, no, nor your father neither; and I trust my Ned will remember it when he is a man, for, by God's mercy, he may live to see us out yet."

Nancy Sundon undertook to devote her-

self, in his wife's absence, to the care of Sir Peter, naturally suffering more than ever, though he was driven for the moment to forget his own sufferings.

“But our trouble, which may end well, for all that is come and gone, please God, is not your trouble, Lady Bell, so go to your masquerade yourself, my dear,” the good-natured woman told Lady Bell at parting. “I’ll take ‘The Cries of London’ to amuse Neddy, as you wish, and thank you heartily for the thought. But I am sure it would vex any child of mine on his bed, as it would vex me, if he could know that he was keeping you, who have nothing to do with him, poor boy, save in your good will, from a grand treat. Go when it is your day, and enjoy yourself with the best, Lady Bell, bless you ! We don’t grudge you the enjoyment, though we have come to grief.”

“Sure, you don’t ; but never think of me, my dear Lady Sundon ; may a blessing and the best of luck go with you. I hope and pray that you will find your boy a great deal

better than you expect, and that we shall all have such a merry meeting again that the finest masquerade will be thrown into the shade." And Lady Bell fully meant to give up the masquerade.

But scarcely had Lady Sundon and Lyddy set out, when another deliberate post letter arrived in Cleveland Court, with the cheering tidings that the sufferer was doing well, and was likely to recover without sustaining any material and permanent injury from his fall.

The chief source of anxiety was removed, and Lady Bell was free to resume her intention of being present at the ball, and was not reduced to eclipse its splendour by being absent, as a throng of the givers of the feast were ready to profess. Miss Sundon might have accompanied Lady Bell, but the former preferred, on the whole, after the late shock to her nerves, to remain a martyr to her new responsibility, and to relapse into luxuriating tenderly over the last grievance.

Lady Bell, in her widowed dignity, could

dispense with a companion. She knew, moreover, with an idle, exultant throb, that in addition to her many admirers, more or less fervent, and more or less men of many ties, with their hearts split into segments, and distributed pretty equally over a select circle of fashionable belles, there was one man who would only see her in the motley company, who was in it for her sake, who, crusty, cantankerous sailor as she had judged him at first, needed but a wave of her hand, and a glance of her eye, to be at her side, at her feet.

Lady Bell, whether she confessed it to herself or not, went on to draw conclusions from the significant circumstance that Captain Fane, of his own free will, departed from his rule and put himself about to be one in a scene so unpalatable to his tastes as this masquerade.

Lady Bell did more. She looked within, and she recognised with a breathless flutter of mingled wonder, trepidation, and bliss, an astounding fact. The chief glory of the

masquerade to her would be the presence of this quondam growling and grave young officer.

Lady Bell was perfectly aware that Harry Fane, though well-born, was poor, and that—while she believed he was an excellent officer, and while she had heard him speak like a natural philosopher to a man of genius—he was a fellow of no mark in her fashionable world. His very profession was against him in some respects.

Lady Bell well knew that Captain Fane would be reckoned a most unsuitable match, the poorest *parti* for a beauty, a Lady Bell, a young widow who had begun her career of worldly prosperity very fairly, and had then taken the world by storm. Was she to end by wantonly squandering her advantages, for which she had paid dearly enough in her day; was she to slight the great matches that might be in store for her, the coronets, the amorous squires, richer than Trevor of Trevor Court, the exquisite beaux like Sir George Waring, for so sober and in

the world's eye so insignificant a figure? Was she, as a lovely widow, rather to copy the example of the Duchess of Manchester with her Irishman, of whom all the world had talked, or that of the Duchess of Leinster with her Scotchman, of whom all the world was talking, in stooping to confer grace, than follow the lead of Lady Waldegrave in aiming as high as the gusty neighbourhood of a throne? Lady Bell laughed in mockery of herself a little hysterically. She made a feint of trying to find time and heart to scold herself, and at the same time she blushed like a rose at the mere thought, and trembled with a newly-discovered happiness.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MASQUED BALL AS IT BEGAN IN REALITY.

LADY BELL was coy. She was provoking, she was wilful, and she was perverse, in the strange gladness which was so dashed with emotion, but of which she strove hard, and almost succeeded, to show only the frolicksome side.

“I shan’t tell you what I am going to wear, Captain Fane,” Lady Bell said, “and you are not to tell whether you are to be a peasant or a prince. I shall put my fingers in my ears if you do. I mean to keep my secret. I tell you all the fun will be in finding each other out—as if I could not find him out among a thousand,” she said to herself, while her glance fell beneath his

reproachful gaze, "and if he should be too stupid to guess me under a disguise," she added—always for her own satisfaction—"why I can take off my mask and enlighten him at any moment."

Captain Fane was forced to submit, thinking in some measure, as his mistress thought, "Well, the information beforehand would only be a precaution to save time. However crowded the rooms may be, she can never elude me."

But neither Lady Bell nor Captain Fane had ever been at a masquerade ball. On the lady and gentleman's separate arrivals, after a way had been made through the excited crowd which pressed about the doors and pushed into the lobby of the club itself, and was driven back by watchmen, in order to witness the spectacle of the season, the scene which presented itself was one of wild disorder.

A great assemblage of pretentious and grotesque figures, who for the most part could do little else to assume foreign and cast-off

native characters, strutted, stalked, sham-bled, stamped, bawled, growled, and squeaked amidst a chorus of loud remarks, shouts of laughter, and roars of derision. Communication between all save the initiated was next to impossible.

Lady Bell and Captain Fane lost themselves, and what was worse, could not find each other, incontinently, and in spite of the magnet which each formed for the other, and the conclusive test which each believed he or she could apply to the other.

“This is the very paradise of fools,” thought the not very tolerant sailor, as he elbowed his way along, and doggedly resisted the audacious attack on his notice made in very wantonness, or on mistaken premises.

“No, I won’t ogle that intolerable shepherdess, Lady Bell never perpetrated such a crook.

“If Columbus keep raking me with his glass, as if I sailed in command of his ship’s consort, I’ll be tempted to give him a knock

on the head with his own telescope. He sail a carvel or discover new lands! He is only fit for the tub of that Diogenes which Dick Turpin has kicked over!

“What a game for grown men and women! all the rank, wealth, and intelligence of England engaged in it, as the news prints will have it to-morrow.

“Where on earth can Lady Bell be? She is not that fair one with the locks of gold—borrowed locks clearly—over her own dark hair. No, this lady is several inches too tall, and she walks like a stork, instead of footing it like a fairy.

“Crossing the line is a joke to this. The Jack Tars have more point in their gambols. Avast! Yonder goes Neptune with his trident, summoned by my words from the vasty deep. But I’ll have none of him. I have enough of him on his own element, to be let off from the contact here.

“Lady Bell is not walking in the minuet. What does she mean by thus giving me the slip? How do I know what harm she may

be running into in the confounded freedom of this masquerade? All the rage is for adventures, pleasant or unpleasant. I suppose every pretty woman will be mortally disappointed if she do not have her share. Oh heavens! the folly of women, and oh heavens! the folly of men—of a pretended Timon in a shabby blue jacket for thinking to mend them.”

But Captain Fane was not there in a blue jacket, shabby or otherwise, else he might not have sought far and wide in vain. He had, between ignorance and a spice of spite at Lady Bell, because she would not afford him a clue to her character for the evening, taken no more distinctive disguise than one of the abounding black dominoes or loose cloaks, of which there were scores in the room, worn by lazy, shy, or proud men and women, many of the former of much the same height as Captain Fane.

After all the domino, as proved by continental patronage, and by its invariable use on the part of those who had covert designs

to prosecute at this or any other masquerade, was the one sufficient and safe disguise in which men and women could glide here and there, and appear and disappear miraculously in the crowd.

But wearers of dominoes who wished to be known, must wait for the late hour when every guest was to remove his or her mask, and step forth in proper identity.

Captain Fane's temper was not his strong point, and his disposition was not accommodating. He was too ruffled and piqued to receive any comfort from the prospect of a humiliating confession of defeat, and a petition for mercy.

In the meantime, if her vexed partner could have known it, poor Lady Bell was not enjoying this masquerade, to which she had looked forward with keen, girlish zest and a softer interest. She had the sore humiliation—granted it was by her own fault—to be recognised by a multitude of her set, of Mrs. Lascelles' friends and of Lady Bell's danglers, and yet to remain

unrecognised by the one man whose recognition she craved.

Lady Bell had dressed herself as a gipsy fortune-teller, in a remarkably respectable rustic gown—for a gipsy, in the authentic red cloak and kerchief over her head, with a pack of incorrectly clean cards. But, unfortunately, fortune-telling, though not so plentiful as blackberries or dominoes, abounded to the degree that Captain Fane, himself undistinguished, passed at a little distance without eliciting a spark of the magnetic influence, the very woman who was swaying him in spite of his reason, and almost of his conscience, who was filling him with a strong, untrained heart's concentrated love, which in contrast with the calculating spent loves of the jaded hearts around, was fit to work like madness in the brain.

Lady Bell was greatly chagrined, half angry with Captain Fane for being horribly, unaccountably stupid, half doubtful, with a pang, if he who continued hidden from her,

as she from him, was really in the room. Something might have happened, a sudden appointment to a ship, an accident—his being stopped, and wounded as well as robbed, on his way to the ball—or a malicious story heard to her discredit, for he was precise in his notions, and stern in upholding them, as she knew from her experience at the water-party.

Sailors had two standing-points from which they regarded women. The one standing-point was that of coarser salt-water Lovelaces and Lotharios, to whom no woman was sacred, and who trusted none. The other was that of Turks, who locked up their women in western harems, and exacted from the women the meekest domesticity.

Harry Fane was no profligate Lovelace, Lady Bell was sure ; but she was not equally certain that he might not develop into a rigid, caustic captain of his own household.

Lady Bell had murmured loudly at the moroseness of poor old Squire Trevor, when she, as a silly child, had tried his patience ;

should she not be a fool indeed to put herself, as a woman, in the power of another master?

And this would not be a fine gentleman who might neglect and be unfaithful to her, and still be suave and tolerant to her faults, having consideration of his own grievous sins.

This would be another sour and savage man, rendered a hundred times more formidable in his prime by the weapons which her love and his would put into his hands to pierce both their hearts.

Yet she was old and wise enough to know that infinitely worse might befall her. What a poor chance there was for women of her class and culture in life! Humbler women might be more stolid, less alive to their injuries, abler to keep their own.

These were sad reflections to qualify the noisy nonsense of a masquerade. Lady Bell was very sorry for herself, and soon grew weary of the amusement. She discovered that it was rarely dependent on the lively

cleverness which could enter into the spirit of the game and play it out well. The ball was kept up rather by the impudence and effrontery which could break through every restraint, and could administer and endorse, without flinching, the rudest rebuffs.

The Troubadours, King Alfreds, and Friar Tucks, the Abbesses, Beggar Girls, and Sapphos, aimed more frequently at outraging than at expressing their *rôles*. It was regarded as the best joke when the Troubadour flung away his guitar, King Alfred hobnobbed with Captain Macheath, and Friar Tuck swam, sauntered, and sniffed at a vinaigrette. In like manner fair applause was won by the Abbess entering into an open flirtation with a soldier of fortune ; by the Beggar Girl complaining pceevishly of the liberties taken by a courtier, who had trodden on her beggar's trappings ; and by Sappho, while oppressed with a "snivelling cold," and beset by a most pronounced Devonshire dialect, indulging in entirely prosaic and matter-of-fact remarks.

No doubt, the abuse of the characters adopted, was a great deal more easily attained than the use would have been, and, making allowance for the average limits of human intellect, the people were wise in their generation. But the effect was disappointing to an enthusiastic young Lady Bell.

The affair did not stop at a brilliant burlesque—it went as far as an earlier screaming farce.

Lady Bell began to grow timid and nervous as the mirth grew faster and more furious. She clung to the support of any acquaintance such as Mrs. Lascelles—who, the wish being father to the thought, possibly, personated the widow loved by Sir Roger de Coverley—in passing through the heaving, changing groups.

Captain Fane was wrong in one suspicion: Lady Bell did not seek adventures. On the contrary, when she saw the bold licence to which they tended, she shrank back from them; she had very soon ceased to

play the rustic fortune-teller, as she had begun to play it with innocent spirit and pains. She was ashamed of thinking of acting where hardly any one else acted.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "COMMON DOMINO."

LADY BELL continued, however, to pay the penalty for the choice of a character, by being accosted on the part of numerous Indian conjurers, sailors, and Roman emperors, all uniting in the demand that she should tell them their fortunes. Neither was the demand made in formal histrionic phrase, but in free and easy modern language, spoken by voices teasingly familiar to her.

But Lady Bell was so bewildered and vexed because all her boasted penetration had failed her, that not having succeeded in detecting the one, she would not take the trouble to identify the many. She guessed that some of these masquers were

Sir George Waring, Lord Boscobel, Colonel Selby; but she did not care to come to a decision. What was it to her who they were?

The gentlemen were not so indifferent or irresolute about the secret of the graceful little fortune-teller. Fine gentlemen though they were, and at their own ball, they were importunate and aggressive, until their advances became irksome and offensive to Lady Bell. She grew sick of them, and the whole riotous company, and wished herself with all her heart well out of it—out of town—back to her peaceful Summerhill, with her calm, beneficent Mrs. Sundon.

Lady Bell absolutely declined doing any more palmistry, and put off the pressing claimants on her powers with as much determination as she could summon to her aid on the spur of the moment.

"No, no, sirs, the stars are not in the ascendant," she said, with a very sincere sigh, "the cards won't shuffle. You must go to another fortune-teller."

“To no other, most unpropitious Sybil,” asserted one voice.

“Let me shuffle your cards,” suggested another, offering to take the tools of Lady Bell’s trade for the night out of her hands.

“I’ll cross your hand with gold, my girl,” said a third, and at the same time presumed to seize Lady Bell’s disengaged hand.

Lady Bell was roused to a more energetic renunciation of her character.

“I won’t be bribed. See here!” she cried.

And raising the spread-out pack of cards, she scattered them far and near.

Her action was partly misunderstood, and some of her followers stopped to pick up the cards, as Lady Bell had hoped they would. She moved on directly, but in the little scuffle she had already been separated from her party. For the moment the crowd had closed in between them, and Lady Bell found herself alone in her disguise, exposed to rougher horse-play.

Any masquer who saw a woman alone in the crowd, might regard her, charitably, in Captain Fane's strain, as a lady looking out for adventures. Whether so looking out, or innocent of such an intention, the mere fact of her having foolishly exposed herself, constituted her good game for the buffoonery of the masquerade.

Yet Lady Bell's trepidation did not amount to panic, and she assured herself that it was silly, for she had simply to take off her mask, and show that she was Lady Bell Trevor, in order to find friends, and be freed from molestation. Any woman who had ever sustained a serious misadventure at a masquerade, like most women who sustained misadventures in a wider sphere—the world, had only been too willing to undergo the infliction, or had yielded to a private reason for risking it, and either way had themselves to thank for their humiliation.

But Lady Bell was certainly unwilling to plead helplessness, crave pity, and virtually

acknowledge that her natural dignity did not stand her in good stead. Moreover, the acknowledgment ought not to be required of her; for already some who knew her, as she was convinced, though it was their present cue to conceal their knowledge, were there. Sir George Waring and Colonel Selby, the first as Sir Roger de Coverley, the second as the Lord Chancellor of England, had come up with her, holding some of her cards in their hands.

Lady Bell was tired, shaken. She could think of no other resource than that of flying from her persecutors with as much speed as she could command, or the crowd would allow. While she hurried along she held down her head, and tried not to listen to besieging addresses, suggesting in her attitude something of the aspect of Ferdinand seeking vainly to shake off Ariel's tricky sprites; notwithstanding that Lady Bell's foes were of more solid substance.

The group arrested the attention of a domino, who at once made for it, catching

up by chance as he did so one of the fortune-teller's cards which dropped from a gentleman's hand. While he joined in the pursuit, which was attracting notice, he heard bets laid on the race that caused his blood to boil, little as bets meant at a time when men wagered on drops running down a window-pane, on an old woman's hobbling, or on the hours that a sick man might live.

The prize might be nothing to Captain Fane, for it was possibly a case of mistaken identity where he was concerned ; and even if he were in the right, he was ignorant and jealous of Lady Bell's reason for keeping herself hidden from him, as it seemed.

It might very well be that she would resent his interference. He could not help remembering, though she had sought to atone for it, how she had treated his opposition at the water-party.

He might reap no thanks, only anger and disgust as the result of his officiousness. But for her sake he would venture all.

He scrawled with his pencil on the card which he had appropriated. "Do you wish to get away and go home without waiting for the unmasking? I shall put you into a chair—say yes, and I shall be satisfied that I am right."

He pushed forward in advance of the others and thrust the card into Lady Bell's hand.

She glanced mechanically at the writing, with which she was not sufficiently acquainted for it to show the writer. But the electric shock was given at last, she had not the slightest fear of trusting herself with that domino. "Oh yes!" she drew a long sigh of relief and joy, standing still and speaking in her natural tones.

"A swindle, a cheat, madam," shouted the wildest of her train; "you decline to read our fortunes, and you answer the first question put to you by an interloper."

"Gentlemen," interposed the domino, speaking in cold tones of indisputable authority and sober reason, "the lady is

fatigued with the foolery, and wishes to go home. I suppose you do not interfere with the inclinations of your guests?"

The gentlemen looked at each other and paused discomfited.

"Sold, by Jove!"

"I wish you joy, Sir George, of your successful rival."

"Devil take him, who can he be? never heard that my lady had any troublesome appendage—country cousin, parson in disguise, former husband come alive again, recent husband come to light."

Before the exclamations burst forth, the domino was leading the fortune-teller through the crowd, compelling a passage for her, to the door of the room, out into the vestibule, and down the stairs, at the foot of which they stopped, and he bade a watchman call a chair.

Then Lady Bell took off her mask, and he pulled off his, and each smiled forgiving and forgiven in the face of the other, while the servants and their company thought the

two a proper couple (though Harry was no Adonis), and on plain enough terms.

But the lady and gentleman were not bent on one of the clandestine expeditions and frantic escapades in which masquerades frequently ended, since they would not set about it barefaced. Therefore the pair being manifestly honest, were left to themselves, unmolested by the kind souls that liked to look on them at a little distance. For anything more Lady Bell and Captain Fane were deficient to the apprehension of their more or less debased fellow-creatures in what are to them essential elements of thrilling interest—crime and shame.

“I am so glad to get out of it—I shall never wish to go to a masquerade again. But could you find no better disguise than a common domino?” Lady Bell began to recover herself, and to pout the least in the world. “There were scores of dominoes like this,” she hinted regretfully, putting a little finger shyly on a fold of the objectionable domino.

"Could my Lady Bell not dress up herself more fitly than in the cloak of a gipsy fortune-teller, when there were crowns and sceptres, wands and wings, in the room?" the gentleman reproached his partner with delirious fervour, softly grasping a corner of the maligned cloak.

"I saw no acting," cried Lady Bell in a flurry, to render the conversation less personal. "A strolling troop, in a barn, would have managed infinitely better. This was all fudge and lampooning. I did not ask for true acting, but I expected something nearer to it from persons of refinement and education. I am going to have the real thing to-morrow."

"Tell me where, Lady Bell," he solicited directly.

"I am going to the play, sir, the veritable play; no wonder everybody rushes to Covent Garden and Drury Lane; though some pretend that there are private theatricals worth listening to, I should feel inclined to doubt it, after to-night. I am

to have a box in company with Miss Greathead of Guy's Cliff, who knows Mrs. Siddons — she is taking the Londoners' hearts by storm, after they nearly broke her heart years ago."

"How do you know that?" he asked for the mere sake of hearing her speak and detaining her a moment longer.

"Oh, I know Mrs. Siddons finely," she sparkled back upon him, enjoying what she imagined to be his curiosity, "and perhaps some day," she lowered her voice inadvertently and the tell-tale colour leapt up in her cheeks, "I shall tell you how she and I came to be personal friends. You have never seen her? Then you have never seen such a genius on the boards. Miss Yates is nothing to her; she eclipses Mr. Garrick himself."

He was not caring for geniuses on the boards at that moment, however much he might care for them at another. What were the stage and its stars to Harry Fane, when Lady Bell had availed herself of his

assistance, had preferred his protection to that of any man of her set at the masquerade, and when the words, "Some day I shall tell you how she and I came to be personal friends," were ringing sweetly in his ears?

CHAPTER XVIII.

ROMEO AND JULIET ON THE STAGE, AND IN
LADY BELL TREVOR AND MISS GREATHEAD'S
BOX.

HARRY FANE found it easier to join Lady Bell in her box with Miss Greathead at Covent Garden than at the masquerade ball. Notwithstanding that, the tide which had turned and was bearing the great actress on to fortune, was so full in its rush, that the crowd at White's was nothing to the jammed mass filling to suffocation the huge theatre.

In the private box Miss Greathead, the other "Lady of Quality," was considerate and generous.

She had been telling Lady Bell that she

remembered when Miss Kemble came to Miss Greathead's mother's house in the capacity of a waiting gentlewoman. She had struck every body by her commanding beauty and her magnificent reading, and she had secured the friendship of each member of the family, so that though she soon quitted Guy's Cliff to be married to her rejected lover, and to return to the boards—her true sphere—her friends continued to watch her struggles and her progress with interest and rejoicing. So long as she and they lived, Sarah Siddons would be welcome among the Greatheads.

Miss Greathead brought her story to a close abruptly, and made room for the young officer in naval uniform.

He looked a quiet, reserved, brave man, rather than a crowing, bullying cock of fashion. At the same time he had been indefatigable in scaling banisters and leaping partitions in order to reach the door of Lady Bell Trevor and Miss Greathead's box. He deserved the seat which he had

won next Lady Bell, though, poor fellow, he might not fill it long—and it might be to his loss that he filled it at all.

Miss Greathead in her woman's heart, while she counselled expediency and condemned imprudence with the rest of the quality, guessed what sitting together for an hour or two was to a couple between whom there might soon roll the seas which divide an old world from a new, and these seas alive with transports, frigates, squadrons, hastening to meet the tug of war.

The pair were young fools (Miss Greathead was shocked at Lady Bell Trevor—the daughter of an earl, though a spendthrift earl, a jointured widow, though her jointure was not great, while the officer by his uniform was no more than a Captain, and was not a private “fortune,” else he could hardly have failed to be known by name to Miss Greathead—she could not think what Lady Bell meant by thus preparing misery for herself and another). But what would you have? such fools abounded,

would not the world be worse if it wanted them? Mrs. Siddons was about to play just such another fool.

At least the sailor must fill his seat as a silent partner, for Mrs. Siddons' acting, and the pit which hung breathless on her words, permitted no chatter in the boxes or elsewhere.

The play was that of *Romeo and Juliet*.*

When Mrs. Siddons took the part of Juliet, she ventured on a new and bold stroke in the middle of her success. Since Lady Bell, a fancy-free childish girl, though a fugitive wife, had been stirred to weep and smile, and hang breathless over the histories of Isabella, Mrs. Beverley, and Euphrasia, Mrs. Siddons had risen to a much loftier range of characters, to her mature masterpieces of Lady Macbeth, Constance, and Queen Katherine.

But for that very reason it appeared doubtful if she could descend from her height of

* This is a double anachronism, Mrs. Siddons did not play in town again till later, and did not play Juliet till later still.

ripe majestic matronhood to the dramatist's idea of a single-hearted love-lorn Italian girl. Even Mrs. Siddons' superbly developed personal traits might turn to faults and work against her in the attempt to personate the slender, tender daughter of the Capulets.

But no sooner did the enchantress come before her judges and begin to weave her spells, than the velvet eyes, with their rich lashes, the white pillars of arms with their regal sweep, became the fond dreamy eyes, the loving, clinging arms inspired by the soul of youthful, radiant, all-defying passion in Juliet.

These two—Lady Bell and Captain Fane—looked at and listened to their own story. True, they were not of sufficiently mighty quality to belong to great rival houses, but the couple belonged in a measure to different classes. Lady Bell might aspire to prospects as far ahead of the naval captain at her side, though he was born and bred in her rank, as were a Vice-

Admiral's commission, and Westminster Abbey.

The circumstance that the difference between Lady Bell and Captain Fane was comparatively slight, only rendered it more cruel if it were to part them, since it did anything save prevent the rose from smelling as sweet.

To sit together at such a play interpreted by so consummate an actress, and an actor who was not immeasurably behind her, was to sit like the guilty King and Queen of Denmark and witness their crime shadowed forth by the players. But whereas it was the past which was held up before the shrinking eyes of the Royal Danes, it seemed a dazzling glimpse of the future which was vouchsafed to these lovers.

The secret of Lady Bell and Captain Fane, so far as it had remained any secret to them, was spoken out in Shakespeare's words and by Siddons' and Kemble's voices. The true lovers there of whom the others were but a vivid realization, sat with heaving

breasts, flushed faces, and eyes fixed on the stage, and dared not glance at each other (did not need to for that matter), each to understand what the other felt—save once or twice.

At the masqued ball in the Capulets' house, when fortune favoured the brave so signally as to find the daring intruder his fit partner in the daughter of the house, in a trice, Captain Fane and Lady Bell turned simultaneously to smile to each other and to afford the opportunity for the whisper on his part, "That fellow was in luck—he was not long in receiving his prize."

At the first suggestion of a private marriage, Captain Fane again sought and received a look as by irresistible fascination. "Do you mark that?" said the swift meaning glance of his eyes, before which Lady Bell's eyes swam and fell as they had never swum and fallen before.

There might have been many more pairs of lovers in the great crowded house that night, taking to themselves, and making a

personal matter of the play and its playing, thus failing to view it in a speculative and critical light.

But there was absolutely nobody to whom Shakespeare and the Kembles were rant and fustian, who was moved to laugh when the players wept, or to joke and shrug when they raved.

There was something marvellous in the unanimity of the sympathy, in the multitude swayed like one man by the poet and the players, till the old Italian tragedy in its passion and its piteousness lived again.

Women clasped their hands and prayed for mercy on the young lovers, sobbed as Juliet drank the potion and composed herself to the semblance—too complete—of death,—and shrieked and swooned when Romeo met Paris at the tomb—when swords were crossed and the boy husband who believed himself widowed in the green accomplishment of his vows, piercing and pierced, fell for ever.

Men drew long breaths, and swore deep

oaths, as over their professional contests, their tussles in Parliament, their meetings at Chalk Farm, their long seats at the green board.

We have it on recent record, that in one row in the orchestra there sat to see Mrs. Siddons play, men whose names are not forgotten, no, nor will be, "Reynolds, Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham, Fox." These men were not babies, but "the tears were seen running down their dark faces."

The theatre was a power in those days, and the excitement which crossed and suspended the excitement of gaming tables and lottery drawings, was in the main a wholesome and saving excitement. Mrs. Siddons made a figure in Lady Bell's history which sounds strange nowadays. Not only did the actress chance to interfere between the girl and imminent destitution, an incident which might in itself be passed over like any other fortuitous incident, but at the crisis of Lady Bell's history, John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons played Romeo and Juliet,

before Captain Fane and Lady Bell, and the players had much to answer for.

A great deal which did come to pass might never have been. Human nature partially roused might have struggled in vain with its swaddling-bands, and sunk back into hopeless helplessness, unable to compass, within the course of a few days, its deliverance by one bold stroke. The opportunity once lost might never have returned. But in the very striking of the clock *Romeo and Juliet* was played.

What hearts must have been stirred to their depths by the grand acting of the grand old players ! What moral revolutions must have been wrought out, what life and death actions compelled—transforming ordinary men and women into heroes and heroines ! It would be curious if it were possible to make such a reckoning.

It may be said to the sceptical of such influences who have only sought for them in the theatre of to-day, what woman shrieks and swoons in the theatre now ? what man,

even, is seized with strong hysterics, as happened once, among the throng who panted, sweated, and quivered to leap on the stage, rush to the rescue, or be in at the death?

We live in a hypercritical and cynical age, and are proud of the fact. We should never have been touched by Dr. Dodd's enunciation of "Mesopotamia"—it is to be feared not even by George Whitfield's breathing forth of "amen," neither by the sham nor by the reality.

Besides, we are misled by visions of our ancestors taking snuff and looking on at executions, and think that they felt very little, and that in the wrong place. Whereas we are the very same men and women, except that we are triply bound by certain refinements and restraints, and are pleased to hug our bonds.

Lady Bell had cried with the best, palpitated and quaked over Romeo and Juliet. She had never once felt disturbed by the remembrance, as a modern playgoer would

have felt disturbed—nay, would have taken credit for the feeling, that she had been behind the scenes with this Juliet, had helped her to nurse her children, add up her bills, and eat her prosaic meals.

Lady Bell was not so carping and invidious. She was more womanly; she was inclined to go to the opposite extreme in her reception of the play and in the effect which it had upon her.

“This Juliet was a sweet victim,” Miss Greathead had declared, wiping her eyes when all was over. “But one must confess she had little more than her deserts. How would it be with any girl in our days, who could be as disobedient and deceitful and monstrously rash as Mistress Juliet showed herself?”

“Oh, Miss Greathead,” protested Lady Bell, forgetting everything in the eagerness of her argument, “I don’t go in for the disobeying and deceiving her parents—only they were so mad in their feud, that what could she ever hope for from their reason or

their duty? They drove her to the climax of her disobedience and deceit, and that after she had consented to be Romeo's. Why, madam," Lady Bell paused, clasped her hands expressively, and exclaimed irrestrainably, "I should have done the same."

"What! swallowed that horrid drug, and taken the doubtful consequences—the only thing certain that she should overwhelm her father and mother and whole kindred in a horrid waste of grief? Then, when she did wake up in the dreadful shadowy tomb, because the first glimmer of light proved to her that the dangerous stratagem had been in vain, and she had lost her lover—— My dear, many a woman has to lose her lover," Miss Greathead broke off, and fanned herself, while a quiver passed over her features. "Think of this American war, and the French wars, and the Scotch rebellion, and all that they cost. But to count the world lost, and refuse to live any longer without the one man! It was selfish and cowardly,

as well as blasphemous, for her to fall on his sword, and make an end of it."

Lady Bell shivered.

"There need not have been any use of violence," she said, after a pause, speaking from the prompting of her heart—"unless, indeed, it was because the young Italian girl was too sorry for herself. A living death would soon have killed her; and if it had not, death in life would have been the greater tribute of the two."

"Lady Bell," said Captain Fane in her ear, taking her hand and holding it fast and tight, as they left the box and wended their slow way after Miss Greathead, whom a friend was conducting to a coffee-house for supper, "I have something to say to you, and you know it, while you have not the heart to deny me the liberty of saying it. I am sure of this much after to-night. Oh, the happiness of knowing that your heart is on my side! What are the heaviest obstacles after that gracious encouragement? But I must speak where we shall not be

interrupted. Will you be my love, and will you meet me on the Mall, where I shall be walking by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, long before there will be any company abroad?"

Lady Bell hung her head and trembled, and would almost have drawn back, frightened at the result which she had helped to provoke.

"You will not be true to yourself and to me if you refuse me such an interview," he put it. "I shan't detain you a moment against your will; do you think I should, or wilfully expose you or your good name? Ah, never; you know me better than think that. But although you have no parents to control you, and are even independent of guardians, you are so young, my darling, that it is such a miserable match for you."

"Hush, hush," Lady Bell stopped him. "You don't know how unworthy I am—what a vain, pleasure-loving, headstrong creature."

"You shall have the best, the purest

pleasure that I can procure for you," bragged Harry. "But all your friends will oppose a marriage between us, especially at this time, when I may get orders any day to sail for America. Even my friends, Sir Peter and Lady Sundon, will be scandalized—as if their house had not proved a snare to me, and as if they were answerable for their pirate of a kinsman snatching at the treasure which he came across."

"I am my own mistress," said Lady Bell, giving a welcome specimen of the wilfulness of which she had spoken. "No one has any right to say anything to me against my choice—as if I would listen!—unless my dear Mrs. Sundon. Oh, I hope she will not think that we have been close and sly. I have writ and told her that I thought one gentleman very different from the rest whom I met in town, and that I imagined she would like him. Only I made a mistake; for I fancied at first that he would be more to her taste than mine. But, sir, I do not grant that you have any title to

hear what I write in my private correspondence with my friend." She made a faint attempt at playfulness.

"Don't you?" questioned Harry, showing that, glum as he had sometimes been in Lady Bell's company, his was not the faint heart which could not win a fair lady. "What presumption I have been guilty of! I leaped to the conclusion that there was to be no more secrets between us, and that you would write to me myself for my consolation in our parting."

At that word of parting, Lady Bell came fluttering down from her proud little perch, and nestled to him in an instant.

"Harry," she said, "I shall meet you to-morrow if you bid me. But take care what you bid me to do, for I trust you entirely."

"God do so and more to me, if I fail you," swore Harry Fane.

"And don't mind any foolish pother people make. I shall not mind it much. Only I hope that they will not be very

rude and disagreeable on your account. Here is the coffee-house; and mind, we must behave ourselves, unless we would have our engagement talked of all over the town before it is fairly concluded.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MEETING ON THE MALL.

BY nine o'clock next morning a young naval officer was pacing the Mall of St. James's under the interlaced boughs of the still leafless trees. He formed a conspicuous figure among the porters, tradesmen's boys, shopwomen, and message girls—all who were then to be seen on the old promenade, which had still its fashionable frequenters at stated hours later in the day.

But conspicuous or inconspicuous, there was no one whose observation was likely to signify to the gentleman, or to the lady who, taking an early walk, attended by her maid, might encounter him, and consent to his attendance for the rest of the way.

The weather, which had been boasting that spring was come a fortnight before, had reversed its sentence—now that March was not only coursing in the blood and in the sap of the trees, but recorded in the calendar—and insisted that the season was no other than midwinter. A raw, surly east wind was blowing; a grey sky was overhead; the turf of the park looked pinched; the leaflets of the trees stood arrested—their green turned to sickly yellow. The little birds retained their songs in their breasts, and only chirped disconsolately in a croaking fashion down in their throats, as they hopped from bough to bough to keep themselves warm.

Captain Fane, with his cocked hat pulled down to his eyebrows, looked grave and almost grim and hard-favoured as he paced the Mall.

Captain Fane's patience was not tried on the occasion. He had not half crossed the park when a little figure, guarded from the chill morning air and from prying eyes

by a furred mantle and a capuchin, came towards him.

The figure was followed by a faithful maid in her white cap and pattens, walking discreetly behind.

The lady advanced, woman fashion, as if she did not see the gentleman, but had been enticed out by the fineness of the disagreeable morning, and by the company on the deserted Mall. She looked over her shoulder to speak to her maid. She tacked, as she picked her steps from side to side of the Mall, like one of the ships in Harry Fane's squadron when the wind was chopping afresh every minute. The figure, with its halting, wavering, but unmistakable progress in his direction, quickened the gentleman's steps in accordance with his bounding pulses, and sent him straight as a launch to meet it.

Captain Fane was deeply sensible of the boon granted to him; but even as he held Lady Bell's hand in his own, his face continued grave and contracted with trouble and pain. The first words which he said

as he turned and walked by her side, giving, not offering his arm, were words of warning in breaking bad news.

“It is well that you have been as good as your word, dearest, well for your own tender heart as for my comfort in remembrance, since our first meeting is likely to be our last. Orders from the Admiralty were waiting my return last night. I did not know, but it was just possible that the *Thunderbomb* might be put in dock to lie high and dry for months. I had even entertained the thought—but that was before I saw you and lost my head with my heart—ah! sweet Bell, I’ll go bail you have much to account for—of seeking to get an appointment to another ship, lest I should be kept hanging about long on shore. Long! The time has passed like a summer day which is all but ended. The *Thunderbomb* is to hold itself in readiness to weigh anchor on or about the 15th, to sail with a detachment of troops for Boston.”

Lady Bell had heard him without in-

terruption till this. "Going away—away from me, Harry?" she cried, struck heavily by the blow, "to join the ranks of war, and dare the stormy seas while these words we have spoken are yet on our lips! No, no, it cannot be."

"My love, I would I could say no and comfort you. Guess, then, what it must be for me to leave you," he appealed to her.

"Then, don't leave me," said Lady Bell desperately. "Oh, Harry Fane, I have been so lonely all my life, an orphan, a loveless wife—I could not help it; I could not love poor Mr. Trevor after he had forced me, a persecuted child, to marry him—till I found Sunny. You need not look disappointed. She has been the dearest, best of friends and sisters to me; but I am frightened I have misled her. I know I would leave her for my lover, my true husband. Will you leave me after this alone again? Cruel Harry! Lady Sundon was right. You are a hard, stubborn man."

"Alas! dear, how can I help it?—I,

who would give my best chance of promotion — well-nigh my life, if — not the Admiralty, but the Powers above, would suffer me to remain with you only three months,” he protested passionately. “It may not be, Lady Bell—I cannot even pray for it.”

“And yet you only half approve of this American war,” she reminded him pertinaciously.

“That is true,” he owned; “and more than I are in the same, or a worse predicament. Lord Effingham has followed the example of Viscount Pitt, in requesting leave to retire from the service; and Captain Wilson, an Irishman, who obtained his commission by raising a hundred and thirty men off his own estate, and who has served with the greatest credit for sixteen years, has also laid down his sword.”

“Then why cannot you do the same?” she implored him.

“Because I do not see it to be my duty,” he said firmly. “I don’t approve of every

tittle of the laws and their execution. For instance, a miserable lad of fifteen was hanged t'other day for some petty theft—it may have been no more than the filching of a sixpence, for which they tell me another wretched fellow swung at Tyburn; but that is not to say that I am not to maintain the laws which are just and good in the main. This is no time to pick holes in the services, but to build them up with our bodies and blood, and let reformation follow in due time. For anything else—even to be with you, it would be rank selfishness.”

“You are too strong and wise for me,” she complained a little bitterly, averting her head.

“You would not have me sacrifice honour and duty,” he pressed her in his turn, “what every true man is bound to maintain in the name of God and his fellows, whatever else he give up? Remember the line of the song you sang the last time I stood by the harpsichord in Cleveland Court:—

‘ I could not love thee, dear, so well,
Loved I not honour more.’

Sailors, like soldiers, belong specially to their king and country. Would you wish your sailor to stain his blue jacket ?”

“No, no, I would have you my best of men,” yielded Lady Bell, with a great sob ; “but I doubt my heart is broke, for I cannot follow you into danger, and if—if——”

She failed in framing the conclusion, that the man she loved, and who had just told her his love, standing there in his flower of youth, health, and strength, might ere long fall on the deck, slippery with blood, never to rise again, or sink in the trough of an engulphing wave, and be washed far beyond the ken of friend or foe.

Lady Bell broke into piteous tears. She had been, as she said, so lonely a young creature, constrained, in the measure, to be self-sufficing, till she had found a friend, and then a love.

He had taught her in the shortest space to be prouder of his love than of all else

belonging to her. She had been right willing to lay down for him her pride of birth and beauty and a belle's worldly expectations. She had consented gladly to resign that belleship, to affront the great world, and, as an anti-climax after her triumphs, to make a poor love marriage.

But it was all in vain. No such voluntary offering was required of her. Her new-found love was snatched from her. Her life was emptied of its fulness at the fullest, just when she had begun to know how rich and rapturous life might be. "Would it have been a relief to you," asked Captain Fane slowly, "though I would never have consented to your facing hardship ('fore George, to think of my Lady Bell being exposed for me!)—if all this had occurred months earlier, and in the interval we had braved the cold displeasure, or the hot wrath, of friends, and were wed, man and wife, whom no man, nothing save death, could put asunder? Would it have made a difference if you could have gone out

with me, as some of the civil authorities, Mr. Eden and others—ay, some of the officers too, have carried out their wives?”

“Oh, Harry, it would have been heaven compared to this!” Lady Bell assured him fervently.

“What!” he cried, half with tender wonder, half covetous to have the fond assurance repeated, “you would cross the seas, and rough it among rough sailors on board ship, and you so young and dainty. You would dwell among strangers, many of them hostile—some say with a good cause, but it is too late to do aught but fight its righteousness or unrighteousness now—and we sailors might be called on to help to take stores up the country, while we were dependent on the fidelity of our barbarous allies, the Indians. You were never in a foreign country. You never even tried living on board ship.”

“Never, never,” corroborated Lady Bell, so heartily, that there was something like cheerfulness in her tone. “But I should

be with you, and what would I mind besides? Do you think I am a coward, sir, or a peevish woman, fit for nothing but to miss my comforts, and make a moan? Don't call the sailors rough, when you are a sailor."

"Then I am delivered from a very great temptation," admitted Harry Fane honestly.

"Don't return thanks for it," she forbade him quickly, "when it is my loss. Oh, Harry! I am yours—yours in our hearts; but I would I were yours so that no man could contradict it, anyhow or anywhere," sighed Lady Bell, clinging to him with a creeping quailing foretaste of all the evils which might be wrought by distance, time, the remonstrances of friends, the misrepresentations of enemies.

CHAPTER XX.

TO TIE OR NOT TO TIE THE KNOT?

TAKE care, Lady Bell!" exclaimed Harry, in rising agitation, "lest I'm only delivered from one temptation to be plunged into another."

"Ah! temptations have no power for you," proclaimed Lady Bell, with a mixture of pride and sorrow; "you are as firm as a rock, and as unyielding when you think you are in the right."

"Don't be too sure," said Captain Fane, and she saw that he could be nervous with all his firmness. "I have let you say how you will want me, because it has been marrow to my bones and joy to my heart, Bell, when God knows I am anxious and sad

enough. But at least you do not resign me to the importunities of any rival, unless it be to the image of Britannia herself," he suggested, with an effort at a jest and a smile, "flourishing, as our general figure-head, and to the death which she may bear in her hand. Think what I must feel to leave you, exposed to the cunning wiles of all the beaux and bucks and great matches who hunt women as men hunt game. These men play with women, and have no remorse—for not believing in a God in heaven, they do not believe in a man or woman on earth. They seek to buy women, and sooner than be foiled in the base barter which they propose, and be forced to confess their titles, rent-rolls, money-bags, even their pretty persons, disparaged, they will try to get the better of women by cruel arts. Such men betray women infernally."

He had worked himself up till he was pouring forth a torrent of rage, hatred, and apprehension. Cold as the morning was, he had to wipe his forehead.

“Why, Harry !” remonstrated Lady Bell, startled, but not altogether offended by his jealous fury, not unwilling to be roused from the dejection into which she was sinking, and to be diverted for a moment from the gloomy prospect before her.

There was no question of the gloom near at hand, and to last for many a day. Come what liked in the future, Harry Fane was going, would go to join his ship in the first place, and the war in the second. He might be subjected to work, weariness, and privation, but he had action and change for his portion. As for her, she must abide in her place forlorn, with the brightness passed from the sky, and the zest gone out of the feast. The “Lubin” of the song was indeed on the eve of departure, of long uncertain tarrying, perhaps till his love’s bloom was faded, her heart withered and dry. Lady Bell had asked once in very idleness and restlessness, that movement, passion, even, in its pangs, might ruffle the still waters of her heart. They were ruffled

with a vengeance, lashed into a piteous storm, to heave and swell for many a day, ere they settled down again in peace.

Knowing what was hanging over her, Lady Bell was fain to forget the knowledge for a moment, in the rousing consideration that Captain Fane, in spite of her frank confession, was half beside himself with jealousy.

She did not altogether disapprove of this state of matters, for was it not evidence of how well the self-controlled sailor loved her?

She was a little frightened at the strength of his passion, nevertheless. Extravagantly as she herself had loved him, she did not know him fully and closely, after all. One of the charms of her love was its mystery.

But Lady Bell thought Harry Fane too severe in his strictures, and certainly needing to be pulled up and taken to task. Aching as her heart was, she tried to make believe for a brief space that the ache was not there, and to do her part in enlightening her lover.

She began to pout with her white face and her tearful eyes.

“Would I forget you in your absence, Harry? Could you ever believe that? What effect would all the wicked stratagems of the finest gentlemen have on me?”

“How can I tell?” he answered gloomily. “I found a whole hornet’s nest buzzing round you when I met you first, and again at the masquerade, and you did not seem able to put them down.”

“Why should I put them down? They are entitled to live as well as the rest of us, even though a busy fellow of a bee looks down upon them as drones or butterflies; indeed they are rather that than hornets. They have never done me harm, and they have squired and amused me many a day; you ought to be more generous to them, sir, and to learn to keep a civil tongue in your head.”

“We have no time for quarrelling,” cried Harry, “you may teach me better manners one day, if we are spared and restored to

each other, and you are still willing to undertake the office. But I could not profit by the best of lessons, and I submit that it would be taking me altogether at a disadvantage to begin when I am just about to bid you farewell."

"Not yet! not yet!" besought Lady Bell, dislodged from her poor little temporary cranny of arch resistance and coquettish teasing, and stretched anew, like another Andromeda, on a sheer precipice, over a sea of misery, until she fell back into her lamentation. "If we had but understood each other faster, and been married within these few weeks—sailors and soldiers must woo and wed in haste—before these terrible sailing orders arrived! Then I could have sailed with you; I should not have been frightened, though we had encountered the enemy. I could have kept quiet below, with you on deck to run to when the guns ceased firing. I might have proved how little I cared for any other man by following you all over the world."

“You can prove it, dear,” declared Harry Fane, hoarse with eagerness, taking her at her word, giving the reins to his passion, and smothering and trampling down every doubt and scruple. “Let us be married before I go, and although I cannot take you with me, I may send for you to my station. Some one of my old messmates and friends will be glad to do as he would be done by, and bring you out to me in his ship.”

Lady Bell was astounded; she had been utterly unprepared for this catching up of her speech, heartfelt though it was.

Harry Fane rushed on, overwhelming her with his special pleading.

“That and that alone would reassure my mind, which is on the rack for you, exposed on a pinnacle as you are. Don’t be vexed with me when I say it, but you are a beautiful woman of rank, very young, greatly admired, as you well may be, moving in gay worldly circles, which unsettle even a man’s head, and throw dust in his eyes. You have not a near relation whose right it

would be to control and guide you, only such thoughtless, irresponsible guardians as even my good cousin! Oh! my love, how shall I leave you thus? for God knows how long," he groaned in anguish, "these six—twelve years. This horrid war has long been hanging over us. Our American brethren are brave and resolute as we are; the strife may last while mother country and colony hold out. How can I trust your constancy exposed to such a test, assailed as it will be when I am gone, and you a young woman, and therefore weak, without blame or shame to you?"

"I understand," acknowledged Lady Bell piteously. "I am not angry with you for distrusting me—how can I be, when I remember how weak I was once before? how wrong as well as weak, I know by my love for you. I was unfair to myself and to another. Do I not shrink from looking you and every one in the face when I think of my marriage? Do I not blush for the name I bear, because of the reason for

bearing it?—that I let myself be sold as a chattel or a slave, rather than die free—and I was not a loyal slave, Harry, never think it; I revolted and fled, like many another slave.”

He was hardly listening to her, he was so dead set on over-persuading her and himself that he might make her his, and that by doing so, he would save her.

“Then do not risk danger again, you are not so much older—only a tender girl of eighteen—widow though you are. I may not even be able to reach you with the poor stay of letters when all your friends will be against me. I cannot wonder and complain, but I must think of myself and my love, and of you and yours, for you love me, and me only, Lady Bell, your lips have sworn it now, over and over.”

“Ay, and I swear it again,” averred Lady Bell, with fond pride.

“No other man will ever be to you what I can be. I will say more, cross-grained sinner as I am, I honestly believe that I

shall raise you, Bell, by your love, as you will raise me by mine. Are not true lovers made for helpmeets as well as mates? And, although I have no cause for boasting, less at this moment perhaps than at any other, still, do you not love me, darling, because you think me honest, though plain, earnest if harsh, a little wiser in my blundering, a little more bent on truth and righteousness in my faultiness, than the ruck of those heartless triflers and blasphemous renouncers of all obligations around you?"

"Have I not called you the best of men?" boasted Lady Bell, with an immensity of faith which might have staggered him and opened his eyes. But he only shut them harder, while he modestly declined the innocent hyperbole.

"Oh, no, a prodigiously erring fellow, and nearly mad at this moment, I suspect. But we should walk through life hand in hand, love, and ask to rise to the best that nature and grace could make us. For that

end we should seek to be reverent and dutiful, and to turn our backs on vanities, follies, and worse. It is not wrong to make this end so sure, that if we live it cannot be baulked, and that no one can ever more come between us to beguile us of our faith in God and each other."

"If I could only claim you as my wife," he argued unweariedly, "I should have no fear to leave you thus solemnly bound to me—thus able by uttering one word to dismiss all suitors, or to consign them to the tender mercies of a man whom you could then call from the ends of the earth—too happy to come, as I came to you at the masquerade—to give you protection. My name alone, when you choose to take it, and replace by it the name which you tell me, hanging your head (I cannot bear to have my love hang her head), it is no pleasure or pride for you to wear, would protect you."

"Ah! Harry, shall I ever wear your dear name?"

“If you will, Lady Bell; and I venture to affirm that it will shelter you as the name of the husband of your own free choice. In the mean time I shall be doing my best to make my name honourable for you. But ah, Bell, grant me my reward now, during the few short hours which we are yet to spend together—while it is in your power to grant it, since it is doubtful whether I shall ever return to claim it.”

“Come back quick, Harry, and you may blame me as you will, I shall be too happy to be blamed by you, and to do whatever you desire,” promised Lady Bell.

“Heaven forgive my conceit, it was my very wonder and delight, which caused me to find fault or fret at every small mote in my sun. But I shall not contradict or plague you more, very likely you will soon have seen the last of a lumpish, captious fellow, whose greatest merit that I can see is, that he no sooner knew you than he cast his quips and cranks, as a misanthropic sailor,

to the winds, and loved you with his whole heart and soul.”

“Oh, heavens ! seen the last, contradict —plague ! Harry, while you profess to love me, how can you speak so unkind ?”

CHAPTER XXI.

ISLINGTON CHURCH EARLY ONE MARCH
MORNING.

HARRY FANE was convinced of all that he had said—to the extremity of the situation which appeared to justify a violent alternative as the only refuge from their trouble. Naturally he succeeded in persuading Lady Bell, while he was not even guilty of deliberately playing upon her feelings. He was tortured with having the cup snatched from his lips—with doubt and dread, and he groaned out his torture audibly, until Lady Bell was brought to enter but a faltering futile objection to his desperate project.

“How can we get married so soon, no-

body knowing, your cousin away, and not a preparation made?"

Nothing more easy, as the records of the generation showed, and as Lady Bell's own recollection might have told her.

Even when a public marriage would be attended with difficulties, a private marriage could be resorted to, and had been resorted to, more than once already by officers hastily bound for America. These private marriages were, according to convenience, announced shortly after the event, or allowed gradually to filter out in suspicious rumours, till the secret was no secret, by the time it was finally disclosed.

Certainly Lady Bab Yelverton, the only child of the Earl of Suffolk, whose runaway match had been much talked of this season, had brought private marriages somewhat into disgrace.

But then Lady Bab, by the way a mere chit of a girl, two years younger than Lady Bell, had defied parental authority in the most daring and glaring manner; Lady

Bab had gone off from her father and mother's house with Lieutenant Gould, just returned from being wounded in America, to be worse wounded by Cupid or Plutus at home. Lord Suffolk had threatened his daughter with his curse, and the cutting her off with a shilling.

Lady Bab's gross filial undutifulness was regarded as even more reprehensible than the Duchess of Leinster's disregard for maternal obligations. The duchess, who was the widowed mother of seventeen children, as well as "the proudest, most expensive woman in town," had thought fit to marry her eldest son's tutor.

But Lady Bell had no father to curse her, and cut her off with a shilling, and in place of seventeen chicks did not possess one whose interest could be affected by the acquisition of a stepfather. If Lady Bell chose to be very imprudent, she was still at liberty to please herself. There was only her friend, Mrs. Sundon, whom Lady Bell was bound to consult, and, fortunately or

unfortunately, Mrs. Sundon was too far away in the emergency to be consulted in time.

Captain Fane was his own master, save when he was with his squadron. He had fewer surviving relatives than Lady Bell owned.

Why then should there be any privacy thought of in the matter?

Because, although there were no near relations, there were many friends, if there was no fortune on either side to be thrown away, there were sufficient prospects to be sacrificed, and penalties to be incurred. Lady Bell had been so much the rage, been believed to have the refusing of such excellent offers, that a host of influential people, if they knew the reckless step which she proposed to take, would rush in—all the faster, that it was no particular business of theirs—to try if they could not prevent the shocking disaster of an attractive young woman of rank committing an unequal love marriage.

Even the Sundons, who had looked on and promoted the intimacy between the pair, would, as Captain Fane foresaw, take blame to themselves when it was too late to oppose the grand conclusion of the intimacy.

Lady Bell for herself, and Captain Fane for her, had a natural dislike to the exclamations, the expostulations, and the nine days' wonder which they must provoke.

Lady Bell would have to sustain the scorn, to support much that was painful in her new position, all alone, as if she were still a widow, should she marry Captain Fane publicly, and should he join his ship immediately and sail on a long voyage with sea-fights in the distance.

On the other hand, Lady Bell and Captain Fane might marry as many of their compeers married, secretly, keep their own counsel, and none be any the wiser, till the gentleman returned to make known the marriage and claim his wife.

No doubt that was the line of argument

followed and found satisfactory long ago by men and women, honourable otherwise, who allowed themselves to become involved in the compromises, the concealments, the double dealings, and the acted lies of private marriages, for which the principals were not condemned by their contemporaries.

In justice alike to our progenitors and to ourselves, we crave leave to remember, that just as our grandfathers and grandmothers managed to combine in their portly and stately persons, along with a foreground of magnificence and elegance, a background of slipshodness and sluttishness, so, even where their virtues were admirable, still their manly morals were laxer, and their womanly manners less delicate, than the morals and manners of the present generation.

There was one obstacle to a private marriage in Lady Bell's case, which nearly compelled the couple to brave public clamour and indignation. Lady Bell was a minor. Captain Fane, in despair at this difficulty, hurried like a madman, braving all imputa-

tions, to the most notorious gaming-houses in town where Squire Godwin's whereabouts might be discovered.

The gallant Captain proposed, failing every other resource, to make a forlorn appeal to Lady Bell's nearest relations.

The gentleman was luckier than he deserved, he stumbled on the very man he sought, who was in London unknown to Lady Bell, and unencountered by her.

Captain Fane and Squire Godwin had an interview, during which the former succeeded in coming to an arrangement with the latter, but by what representation and inducement, by what descent to lower depths on the part of the ruined gentleman, and by what ill-bestowal of a portion of Harry Fane's last prize-money, never transpired. The transaction was not likely to be reported by Mr. Godwin, neither was it one on which Harry Fane would care to look back.

Captain Fane, however, took the precaution of introducing Squire Godwin for

a few moments to the Sundons' house in Cleveland Court.

Lady Bell met her uncle for the first time since her marriage to Squire Trevor. She could not help regarding Squire Godwin as a bird of evil omen. His appearance on the scene, like a malignant spectre at the critical juncture, was a shock to Lady Bell, and smote her, while it lasted, with blank confusion and consternation.

But Mr. Godwin's stay was short, since the master of the house was kept in the dark as to the origin of a visit which he did not relish, and for bringing about which he did not thank Captain Fane.

Sir Peter was ready to shake himself up and put a stop to the intrusion, while he prevented any attempt which it might imply of the resumption of authority by Squire Godwin over his niece, Lady Bell Trevor, Sir Peter's honoured guest.

Mr. Godwin did not wait to be dismissed, he took his leave, giving Lady Bell, in her agitation, a dim impression that while his

air was as distinguished as ever, in the studied carelessness—of which the study was so perfect, that it became invisible—and his dress as irreproachable, every line in his handsome person was drawn more deeply and sharply. Crows' toes and furrows had multiplied incalculably, till the wrinkles of premature old age were shrivelling and wizening his face. The once noble field was all covered over with cramped, contracted, ugly hand-writing.

Lady Bell could not so much as rally breath and courage to inquire for her Aunt Die. She was so simple and ignorant, that she did not even guess what had brought her lover into strange contact and alliance with Squire Godwin, or how the latter came by the knowledge, the merest whisper of which was sufficient to cause her to leap from her chair, for Mr. Godwin contrived in his brief greetings to say one or two pertinent words aside to her.

The Squire addressed Lady Bell Trevor with a little more consideration than he had

been wont to bestow on Lady Bell Etheredge, but there remained the echo of the old contempt in the tone of his speech.

“So you think to contract a second marriage, madam; well, matrimony is honourable, though I have not tried it on my own account. I am sorry that I cannot say much for the wisdom of the step in this instance, but I do not presume to advise, far less to interfere. It says much for the happiness of the last knot (eh! my Lady Bell?) that you are so keen to tie another.”

The one difficulty overcome, the remainder of the scheme was even exceptionally practicable, and circumstances like cards played themselves, as it were, in Captain Fane's and Lady Bell's hand.

A letter arrived from Lady Sundon to inform Sir Peter in particular and “all friends who were interested,” that her boy was in a fair way of recovery, but still called for not less than a month's nursing from her and Lyddy.

In the delay, Sir Peter, who was miser-

able, left in town with only Nancy of all his family, and who had got all that he could expect from the opinion of the medical men, resolved to break up his establishment in London for the season, return to Sundon Green, and await his wife there.

Thus the best pretext was afforded gratis to Lady Bell for sincerely assuring Sir Peter, with grateful mention of his hospitality, that he need not have any hesitation on her account. Her visit had already extended beyond its proposed limits. Mrs. Sundon was anxious for Lady Bell's return. Lady Bell herself was beginning to long to be out of the racket which had made a fine change, but which she did not affect for a continuance, and to be at home again and settled down quietly at Summerhill.

But first Lady Bell had to spend a few days at the village of Islington, with her old nurse at Lady Lucie Penruddock's.

The nurse's accommodation was so scanty, that Lady Bell could not take her maid. Lady Bell would come back to Cleveland

Court to fetch the servant, when Sir Peter kindly arranged to send his old coachman to be their escort to Lumley, before the Sundons themselves went into the country.

Nothing could be more proper and obliging. In the meantime, Captain Fane had taken leave of his friends in town, and started for Portsmouth, but he journeyed by a roundabout road, and halted on the way.

Lady Bell did think that fate had been against her, when she was constrained to accomplish a second marriage, shorn like the first of all state and splendour. But there was no help for it.

In the parish church of Islington, attended by her nurse, and given away by a friend of the nurse's, with the clerk and the pew-opener to serve as additional witnesses, early one stormy March morning, Lady Bell was lawfully married to Harry Fane.

CHAPTER XXII.

BACK AT SUMMERHILL.

IT was like a dream to Lady Bell as she travelled back to Summerhill.

There passed in review before her, like the shifting scenes of a dream, her London season and its triumphs, the love which had taken her by storm in the middle of the world's vanities, the declaration of love after the play, the announcement on the Mall of the arrival of Harry Fane's sailing orders, the visit to Islington, the hasty private marriage, and at last the wrench with which the bridegroom had torn himself from his bride.

Could it all have happened to Lady Bell, and was she really a new creature, belong-

ing to another, and bearing another name—his precious name, if the truth were known?

Or had she only awakened from a dream? The dream might have passed with the bleakness and storms, which were over and gone, while in their place had come the March of daffodils and bluebells ready to welcome her back to Summerhill.

Ah! no, Lady Bell was a new creature. Her heart was at the sea. These land charms had become stale, flat, and unprofitable to her, since he was not there to share them. She would give them all willingly for a taste of the breeze, salt on her lips. Her eyes filled with tears, “idle tears,” at the sight of a flock of curlews hovering over a waste and recalling to her sea-gulls skimming the waves. Her whole being seemed dissolving in yearning and longing for her lover and husband. Existence would not be worth having till he was restored to her.

But, in the first place, how was Lady Bell to present herself to her dear Mrs.

Sundon?—how account for the transformation in her to those penetrating eyes, and that wise, experienced heart, unless by confiding the truth to Mrs. Sundon? And, in that case, how was she to obtain forgiveness for the march which she had stolen on her friend?

Captain Fane had left Lady Bell free to take what friends she chose into the secret. It was on her account, rather than on his, that a secret had been made.

Lady Bell had no thought but of telling the story to “Sunny” some time—long before Captain Fane’s return.

But there was no question that the telling would call for an effort on Lady Bell’s part, tell when she might. There would be more than a breach of confidence to receive forgiveness—more, even, than the assertion of Lady Bell’s independence—there would be her subjugation to the powerful influence of another, which had superseded Mrs. Sundon’s influence.

The deed was done, yet Lady Bell felt

more unequal than ever to the sensation that she would create; the remonstrances, useless though they must be, which she would raise, the reflections that might be cast on another, the offence that might be taken by a friend to whom she had not ceased to be warmly attached. In fact, instead of loving her neighbour less, because of the one great central human love, she seemed to grow specially tender to the wrongs and smarts of every human creature, all for one mortal man's dear sake.

Withal, the bashfulness of the acknowledged bride was quadrupled in the unacknowledged bride. True, Lady Bell had been married before, but that marriage had been altogether different—such a miserable travesty and poor mockery, that Lady Bell actually cried over the remembrance of her old self, and the dead Squire, for what they had defrauded each other of, and been defrauded of, many a time, during the first weeks of her marriage to Henry Fane.

It felt so strange to see Summerhill again.

There was the dainty, slightly fantastic women's house and grounds exactly as she had left them, but surely with a failure in their qualities which she had not distinguished before.

The place presented the same want of shade and substance which Queen Elizabeth had specially requested might be made in her picture. And the traits of life at Summerhill had corresponded with Queen Elizabeth's idea that she and her maids should eat in private of the lightest and most refined viands, while the ladies left all that was solid and strong to the grosser appetites and needs of the gentlemen.

Everything at Summerhill was fresh and feminine to a degree; but there was a suspicion of flimsiness and make-believe in the very delicacy and over-abundance of knick-knacks, where two young women had kept house together, and sworn unalterable first friendship, presuming to turn the course of nature, like these sister figures away among the Welsh mountains.

To recognise Summerhill the same as she had left it, and yet to look on it with different eyes, knowing all the time that the difference lay in her own eyes, was a singular half-remorseful experience to Lady Bell. She was almost glad that Mrs. Sundon did not hear the carriage-wheels and run out to meet her. There was only Caro in her nurse's arms at the door. It was a positive relief to see that Caro, quite in the course of nature, had grown by the addition of a few more months to her short lease of life, until there was some risk at her not knowing Caro, in addition to the apprehended risk of Caro's not knowing Lady Bell. There was comfort in finding that anybody, even Caro, had undergone a change, because of the tremendous change in Lady Bell, of which she was tremblingly conscious. She should be thankful when the meeting with her friend was over.

Lady Bell hurried, stumbling in her habit, into the bright little parlour—blindingly bright, and at the same time empty

it looked, though it had the fine presence of Mrs. Sundon advancing to its threshold.

There were two little cries of "Bell," "Sunny," which had a rush of old familiar affection in their tones that meant kisses—perfectly hearty and sincere in their fondness, and a little laughter, with twinkled-away tears.

These tears seemed natural enough when Lady Bell was weary after an exciting journey, and Mrs. Sundon might be wearier still with waiting, and with staying all alone, having had no cheerful young friend at hand to dissipate grievous memories.

It seemed to Lady Bell as if a cloud of anticipated awkwardness and indefinable constraint and distress had burst and vanished, as such clouds will sometimes vanish at the moment of contact. She had found again her indulgent, magnanimous Mrs. Sundon, on whose favour and generosity Lady Bell could throw herself confidently—only she would spare both her

friend and herself in the first hours of their meeting.

When Lady Bell had composed herself to scrutinize and draw conclusions, it struck her with quick pain that Sunny was looking ill.

Mrs. Sundon wore an exceedingly simple muslin dress, with the tight sleeves ending in frills at the wrist, and falling over the hands, the neckerchief being surmounted with the same wide plaited frills, out of which rose the fair pillar of the throat, like the neck of a white heifer out of a garland.

But Lady Bell had never seen the grand womanly proportions brought nearer to the spareness of attenuation, while the face was almost wan in its colourlessness.

Clearly Mrs. Sundon had not been flourishing on keeping house alone; she had been wont to treat "nerves" and "vapours"—regarded as bodily complaints, with lofty derision and condemnation; yet her own nerves were unstrung, for she continued, though she did not allow it in words, to be

agitated by Lady Bell's arrival. There was a stir and quiver of Mrs. Sundon's features as of a rock which had been disturbed and shaken, and could not at once regain its entire balance and firm quietude.

Lady Bell could not account for the involuntary disturbance and the striving in vain to overcome it, in her friend's expressive face, and in her cold passive hand, which shook sensibly in Lady Bell's feverish clasp, unless it were that Mrs. Sundon's health had become impaired.

If that were so, there must be laid to Lady Bell's charge, among other acts of wilfulness and indiscretion, an ungracious oversight—the friend who had been so good to Lady Bell had pined in her absence, and had been left to pine.

Or was it simply the disturbance in Lady Bell's own flushed face, the thrilling of her own pulses, which her morbid fancy and guilty conscience transferred to her poor abused friend?

No; here was an absent-minded, distrait

woman, who had to assume an interest which she did not feel, in narratives that ought to have been, from her old familiarity with the scene, and her sisterly regard for the heroine, stimulating and engrossing in their effect upon the listener.

Lady Bell was conscious of this while she sat chattering incessantly of all her different adventures, at the auctions and the routs, and was not once pulled up and brought to book by such searching cross-examination as the judge, jury, and counsel for the prosecution combined in the old Sunny, would have known well how to conduct.

Even when Lady Bell forced her tripping tongue to speak Captain Fane's name, while her eyes fell convicted, until their lashes rested on her cheeks dyed with burning blushes, she might have spared herself the trepidation and terror of instant discovery. Sunny's mind was wool-gathering, and she did not recall her scattered faculties to make a single observation.

Lady Bell would have begun to have a

revulsion of feeling, and, from being chilled, would have been mortified had she not been alarmed.

As the day wore on, however, Lady Bell talked and talked her friend out of her stupor, and procured a measure of response in home news. These were but vapid concerns now to Lady Bell, but she was not going to betray her conviction of their vapidness.

Caro had cut ever so many teeth. The stubble chickens were ready for killing. The Spanish jasmine had survived the winter. The mayor and the good people of Lumley and Nutfield were all well, and,—oh yes, Master Charles had got his colours, and was going up to town to practise drill with the awkward squad in the reserve of his regiment, before he joined the main body somewhere in the colonies—Mrs. Sundon had forgotten exactly where. No, she could not say that she was vastly sorry for Miss Kingscote, as the young fellow was fulfilling his calling, and going where duty and the

prospect of promotion, whether it were by life or death, called him.

The last words, in answer to Lady Bell's sympathetic inquiry, were spoken so shortly as to remind Lady Bell that there was a worse end than that of death in Mrs. Sundon's experience.

END OF VOL II.



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